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WILLIAM J. DOMINIK

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THE MYTHIC VOICE OF STATIUS

POWER AND POLITICS IN THE *THEBAID*

BY

WILLIAM J. DOMINIK

E.J. BRILL
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For Teresa

On ne peut écrire sans public et sans mythe—sans un *certain* public que les circonstances historiques ont fait, sans un *certain* mythe de la littérature qui dépend, en une très large mesure, des demandes de ce public. En un mot l'auteur est en situation, comme tous les autres hommes. Mais ses écrits, comme tout projet humain, enferment à la fois, précisent et dépassent cette situation, l'expliquent même et la fondent. . . .

Jean-Paul Sartre (1948: 184)

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My debt to the writings of Flavian scholars, especially Frederick Ahl (Cornell University) and David Vessey (King's College, London) is apparent from the first few pages; even though their views in many cases differ substantially from those presented in this study, this disagreement (and in some instances, agreement) in fact is evidence of considerable indebtedness.

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University of Natal W.J.D.
Durban, South Africa
August 1994

PREFACE

This is the first thematic study of the *Thebaid* of Statius to be published in monograph form in English since David Vessey's *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge 1973);[1] furthermore, it is the only study published that deals predominantly with the subject of power in the epic. It examines in detail the thematic design of the *Thebaid* and explores its political undercurrents. The book is in four main parts: 'Use and Abuse of Supernatural Power', 'Pursuit and Abuse of Monarchal Power', 'Consequences of the Abuse of Power', and 'Political Relevance to Contemporary Rome'. Developed in part from an earlier article entitled 'Monarchal Power and Imperial Politics in Statius' *Thebaid*' that appeared in *The Imperial Muse: Flavian Epicist to Claudian* (Bendigo 1990),[2] the views expressed represent a fundamental departure from the ideas presented in Vessey's study and constitute a critical reassessment of the *Thebaid*.

Let me state what the Thebaid is *not*, negating the comments of some twentieth century scholars. The *Thebaid* is not an epic about nothing.[3] Nor is it an epic of a contented artist busily assembling material in a happy world, his story a skeleton consisting of the dry bones of legend suitable for a museum, not a living form.[4] It does not lack intellectual strength[5] or thematic unity;[6] nor are its themes irrelevant to the world of its creator.[7] The assertions that these denials imply are representative of those made this century concerning the lack of meaning in the *Thebaid*. I hope to show during the course of this book that they are not merely severe judgements but entirely erroneous.

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[1] My *Speech and Rhetoric in Statius' Thebaid* (1994) is concerned mainly with the form, function and meaning of the speeches in the *Thebaid*, while the important study of Ahl (1986: 2803–2912) was not published as a separate volume.

[2] I thank Aureal Publications for kindly giving me permission to reuse material from this article in chapters two and four.

[3] *Contra* Ogilvie (1980: 234).

[4] *Contra* Rothfeld (1912–13: 46).

[5] *Contra* Quinn (1979: 166).

[6] *Contra* Butler (1909: 18f., 213), Legras (1905: 147–54), Garrod (1906b: 277), Hartman (1916: 354), Summers (1920: 51f.), Moore (1921: 108), Duff (1927: 472), Barker (1933: 27), Maher (1950: 117–20), Greene (1963: 102), Mendell (1967: 13f., 125), Williams (1972: xv) and Ogilvie (1980: 233f.).

[7] *Contra*, for example, Ogilvie (1980: 233ff.).

Johnson remarks in his book on Lucan: 'Poets are not theologians or philosophers or historians. They do not think thoughts, they do not quite deliver messages. They *see* their own feelings and the feelings of their contemporaries, and from what they see they fashion dreams of reality (as Nabokov put it, "the facts of fiction")'.[8] For Statius the first and third sentences of this statement hold true; the second does the poet an intellectual injustice. Of course the *Thebaid*'s poet is not a theologian, philosopher or historian, and of course he *sees* his own feelings and those of his contemporaries from which he shapes his poetry. But a close reading of the *Thebaid* reveals that in addition to *communicating* his own feelings *and* thoughts (and imaging those of his contemporaries in the process—historians, biographers, philosophers and other poets), he delivers a clear message under the fictional guise of myth for those willing to listen. Recently Vessey has argued: 'If we seek to impose a message on the text, or elicit one from it, we run the risk of hiding more than we unveil. The *Thebaid* is not an easy text; it is best to allow it to be what it is.'[9] Such an attitude seems to me to constitute an evasion of the critical task. Indeed it is the duty of the critic (not to impose meaning but) to interpret the text, to determine its *verbal meaning*, to get at (nay, even extract) its *significance*. Admittedly the *Thebaid* makes heavy demands on the literary competence of even the most careful reader, but this is a challenge that a serious critic should take up rather than avoid.

What is the *Thebaid* about? In a word: power. On this cardinal theme the text reflects, its focus emphatic, its message incisive. Virtually every event is related in some way to the unfavourable aspects of the exercise of power.[10] Prominent is the issue of its pursuit and abuse, the consequent suffering and impotence of its victims. But the *Thebaid* is also an epic of *ideas*:[11] Statius develops as programme three principal sub-themes (corresponding to the first three chapter headings) that the reader is directed to follow throughout the epic; these guiding ideas not only inform, underpin and give meaning to the poem, but they also interrelate thematically and tonally, thereby making the poem a unified work of art. Given the considerable length and scope of

[8] Johnson (1987: ix).

[9] Vessey (1992: xlii).

[10] *Contra* Kabsch (1968: 182), who observes that Statius portrays power and its negative consequences, but maintains that this theme is not anchored deeply enough.

[11] *Contra* Toohey (1992: 187).

the text, my discussion of the sub-themes comprising the conceptual apparatus of the *Thebaid* focuses on its major design features, although reference is made to minor textual details in order to elucidate some of the poem's more precise, refined meanings. There is some discussion of *Quellenforschung*, particularly where such consideration bears upon the interpretation of key passages, but this generally lies outside the purpose and compass of the present work. My critical analysis of the text in the first three chapters demonstrates that the *Thebaid* sends out a fairly determined set of semiotic signals that *mean in a rather precise way*; in the process of decoding and interpreting the text, I attempt to show *how* the poem's significations are revealed. Accordingly, close attention is given not only to the actions, speeches and thoughts of the characters but also such matters as plot, patterns of imagery, and diction. After this reading of the text, I attempt in a final chapter to elicit some of its underlying political significances without the pretence of absolute certainty.

All who consider themselves to be serious students of literature today must be familiar with literary theory and critical methodology. Although I have gained substantial benefit from the writings of various modern critics, especially those (as they relate to the interpretation of the *Thebaid*) of E. D. Hirsch and M. M. Bakhtin,[12] my policy has been to exclude the direct mention of such criticism and the names of its proponents from my discussion. My concern is with the textual details of the *Thebaid*, not with the application of general theoretical concepts to the text. Accordingly I do not begin this book with what seems to be the standard introductory chapter dealing with the relevance of modern critical writings to the interpretation of Roman literature.[13] However, it will become obvious to any reader of the first three chapters of this monograph that I believe the *Thebaid* is a *readable* text, which is to say, its *verbal meaning* is decidable (if significantly ambiguous in places) to a high degree of probability and therefore largely determinable to the competent, sensitive reader who gives due attention to all evidence internal to the text.[14] More difficult to assess is the *significance* of the

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[12] Hirsch (1967; 1976); Bakhtin (1968; 1973).

[13] Readers interested in this issue and others dealing with the contemporary interpretation of Roman poetry should read the essays in Galinsky (1992) and de Jong and Sullivan (1993).

[14] From this it will be apparent that I do not subscribe to subjectivist, reader-oriented approaches that preclude the possibility of a decidable, determinate *verbal meaning* for the *Thebaid* and that would consider equally valid any number of meanings

Thebaid (a subject of chapter four), that is, the extent to which its verbal meaning relates to the historico-cultural context of the poet and his personal situation; although such consideration is by nature speculative and is therefore indeterminate, it is this aspect of literary criticism that enlivens the text and renders it resonant, meaningful, even ensorcelling for a modern reader.

So in this critical study I grind two complementary axes with considerable enthusiasm. First, the *Thebaid* is preoccupied with power and its pursuit and abuse; secondly, the epic's message on the consequences of abusing power applies to the contemporary political situation. The method I have adopted is argumentative rather than descriptive and involves the critical examination of select passages pertaining to the subject of power and its political dimensions. My method is to establish *textually* the *Thebaid*'s conception of power (chapters one–three) before proceeding to the contemporary relevance of the theme and individual characters (chapter four).

The text of the *Thebaid* used in this study (with a few emendations in text and punctuation and numerous changes in capitalisation) is that edited by D. Hill (Leiden 1983); at the time of going to press only volumes 1 (1990) and 2 (1991) of the three volumes comprising R. Lesueur's more recent edition have been published. The provision of my own translations makes the book accessible to the Latinless reader. It is my firm belief that classical poetry deserves to be (and can be successfully) translated as verse, not prose, since this helps to convey a sense of the text *as* poetry. Accordingly the translations are line-by-line, with each hexametric line of the *Thebaid* and *Silvae* containing five or (wherever possible) six stresses and eleven to fifteen syllables; each translated line of the hendecasyllabic *Silvae* contains eleven or twelve syllables.

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that have come into existence as the result of the diverse critical strategies employed by individual readers. Complete certainty of course can never be achieved as to a text's meaning, but it seems to me if all readings of the *Thebaid* were equally valid that it would *possess* per se very little meaning. For a view of the text as a history of its readings, see Martindale (1993).

CHAPTER ONE

USE AND ABUSE OF SUPERNATURAL POWER

As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods;
They kill us for their sport.

Shakespeare, *King Lear* 4.1.37f.

I see little evidence in this world of the so-called goodness of God. On the contrary, it seems to me that, on the strength of his daily acts, He must be set down a most stupid, cruel and villainous fellow.

Henry Mencken[1]

Abuse of supernatural power is the predominant, pervasive motif in the *Thebaid.* The numerous cruel and unjust actions of the higher powers bear testimony, as does their frequent lack of compassion and concern for humanity. Although the gods occasionally take a fleeting interest in the misfortune of a favourite person or express a selfish—if mostly justifiable—concern over the fate of a special city, their attitude toward the human race is generally one of hostility or indifference. Major scenes (1.197ff.; 3.218ff.; 7.1ff.; 8.1ff.) include Jovian (1.214–47; 3.229–52; 7.6–33) or Plutonian (8.34–79) decrees whose fulfilment demands the death and suffering of countless innocent victims who are caught up in a tragic war incited primarily by malevolent supernatural forces. Man's subsequent irrational and impious conduct is often shown to be inspired by divine powers who are essentially antagonistic to the human race and are shown propelling man headlong toward destruction. The *Thebaid* is clearly not so much 'the tale of man's *progress* toward self-annihilation'[2] (my emphasis) as it is the tale of the supernaturally engineered annihilation of humanity. In this regard it is incorrect to suggest that Statius is not 'really interested, despite the machinery, in the relations of a divine principle with the human';[3] rather, the *Götterapparat* of the *Thebaid* underpins its structure, as the destructive impact upon man of his relationship with the gods is the focus of the entire epic.

Modern scholars have tended to shape their view of the *Thebaid*

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[1] Durant (1932: 34).
[2] Ahl (1982: 939).
[3] Greene (1963: 102).

according to the Judaeo-Christian concept of retribution and guilt, which is usually based on Jupiter's opening, programmatic speech asserting that human criminality demands divine retribution (1.214–47). Vessey states categorically: 'Crime and punishment are the central theme of Jupiter's speech. The guilt of Thebes cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. . . . In the end, sin cannot remain unpunished';[4] '. . . the King of Heaven cannot ignore the depravity and corruption of mankind'.[5] However, there is little evidence to sustain such an interpretation. Nor is there any real evidence to sustain the description of Jupiter as a kind, compassionate and fair-minded supernatural power, as several critics have asserted;[6] in fact his actions and speeches portray him as anything but a benevolent, merciful and just god.[7] The speeches of this deity are among the most important in the *Thebaid*.[8] He reveals himself in his speeches as an omnipotent, misanthropic, dissimulating,

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[4] Vessey (1973: 83, 91; cf. 82–91, esp. 83–87).

[5] Vessey (1992: xxii).

[6] Typical are the comments of d'Espèrey (1983: 102), who refers to the omnipotent Olympian as a personification of 'volonté bonne' and Gossage (1972: 195), who describes Jupiter as 'essentially a kind deity', 'a good deity and considerate of mankind' (1972: 200). Gossage also asserts (1969: 80f.) that 'Jupiter's autocracy, despite his resolution to punish men for their wickedness, is tempered with a mildness and a paternal solicitude for his subjects, human and divine, that bear some resemblance to qualities in the Jupiter of the *Aeneid* but also reflect some of the philosophical and more clearly formulated ideals of kingship that were evolved in the first century of Roman imperial rule, and especially the Stoic concept of the providential ruler of the universe'. Vessey (1973: 82–91) discusses Jupiter from an entirely Stoic perspective, which leads him to assert wrongly that he 'must be an agent of moral discipline' (1992: xxii), is 'not a tyrant', that he 'rules with equity' (1973: 82) and is a 'just and impartial deity' (1973: 91); cf. Vessey (1973: 165–57 *et passim*). Such misunderstanding of Jupiter's basic character stems from two main factors: not only has there been a general inattention to and misunderstanding of textual details in the epic, but most critics pay more attention to the various claims of Jupiter to benevolence and tolerance than to the credibility of the evidence he provides in support of his claims. In her treatment of Jupiter in Statian epic, Kabsch (1968: 130) argues that he is portrayed ambiguously, but this view results from a failure to differentiate between the claims and actions of this deity. On Roman Jupiter see Koch (1937), Beller (1979) and Schubert (1984).

[7] Ahl sorely understates the case when he says that 'there is not exactly a surplus of humane feeling in the ruler of Olympus' (1966: 131f.); 'Jupiter's role in the epic is not altogether flattering' (1982: 928); and 'Jupiter falls short of being a morally positive force in the epic' (1986: 2861). So too does Feeney (1991: 355): 'The cumulative effect of this human characterisation of Jupiter is so relentless that it becomes exceedingly difficult to have any confidence either in Jupiter's worth as a moral adjudicator for the poem, or in interpretations which cast him in this role'. Feeney's observation (1991: 371) that Jupiter's 'violence, self-indulgence, and final indifference . . . pushes to the limit the menacing side of his epic personality' is more to the point.

[8] Notwithstanding the reference of Götting (1969: 89) to Jupiter as a 'Personifikation des Fatums', the speeches (and actions) of Jupiter clearly point to his objective reality.

cruel and uncompassionate deity.[9] His speeches (1.214–47; 1.285–302; 3.229–52; 7.6–33) play a critical rôle in three of the most important scenes in the epic and emphasise his determination to bring about the destruction of Thebes and Argos.

Notwithstanding any possible psychological or allegorical interpretations that can be ascribed to (or forced upon) conventional supernatural powers such as Mars and Venus, every indication in the text points to their anthropomorphic corporeality.[10] Even abstract forces such as *furor* and *pietas* are portrayed as actual physical deities (Furor, 'Madness'; e.g., 4.661; 5.74; 7.52; 10.832; Pietas, 'Piety'; e.g., 7.217; 11.98, 466, 605) rather than as mere embodiments of psychological and moral forces.[11] Schetter argues rightly that *furor* is one of the central motifs of the poem and observes that the frenzied and irrational behaviour of man is frequently inspired by the gods.[12] This applies even to the Theban race although it has a genetic predisposition to *furor* (cf. 1.126).[13] To judge from the examples of divine punishment that the poet selects for incorporation into the speeches and narrative of the *Thebaid*: divine retribution appears to consist of harsh punishments that generally far exceed in magnitude the seriousness of the offences committed and that are directed against humanity irrespective of the degree of involvement, intention or guilt of particular individuals. Thus the malevolence of the gods is stressed and the controlling idea of supernatural injustice is advanced.

Major scenes and numerous minor incidents attest (specifically) to the power, malignity and injustice of the Olympians. In each of three major scenes (1.197ff.; 3.218ff.; 7.1ff.)—the first two are Olympian councils—a speech of Jupiter (1.214–47; 3.229–52; 7.6–33) emphasises

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[9] Schönberger's (1965: 132) description of Jupiter's qualities is particularly apt: 'Statius will ihn deshalb nicht als sinn—und gefühllosen Quäler hinstellen, auch nicht als neidischen, bösen Daemon, sondern als gerechten, wenn auch strafenden Gott'.

[10] As is shown below in the discussions of the various abstract forces in the *Thebaid*. *Contra* Vessey (1973: 86ff.; 1982: 578) and Feeney (1991: 365–70, 374f.), who, like Lewis (1936: 49–56), consider the gods in the *Thebaid* to be allegories of universal forces and emotions, a stance consistent in Vessey's case with his Stoic interpretation of the epic.

[11] Furor ('Madness') and Pietas ('Piety') are just a couple of the many abstract forces that Statius personifies in the *Thebaid*. Most of the personified forces are portrayed unfavourably, such as Furor, Virtus ('Virtue'), Natura ('Nature') and Fatum ('Fate'); the two notable exceptions are Pietas and Clementia ('Clemency'), who in fact are the only deities depicted favourably.

[12] Schetter (1960: 5ff).

[13] On the significance of genetic determinism in the *Thebaid*, see Davis (1994).

his destructive rôle through its concern with the execution of his plan for the destruction of Thebes and Argos. In each scene a Jovian command that is designed to cause maximum destruction is followed by the appeal of an Olympian colleague for mercy on behalf of Thebes or Argos. Admittedly these pleas by Juno (1.250–82), Venus (3.269–91) and Bacchus (7.255–92) contain an element of selfish concern, but the replies to them by Jupiter (1.285–302; 7.195–221) and Mars (3.295–316) stress the firm determination of Jupiter to destroy the two cities and remind the audience that he is firmly in control of events that are unfolding. The other Olympians do not simply submit to Jupiter through fear of their bloodthirsty and vindictive overlord; nor is it only Mars who is pleased about the inevitable destruction and bloodshed that will result from Jupiter's plan.[14] Rather, Olympians such as Juno (e.g., 10.126ff.), Venus (e.g., 5.157ff., 190ff.) and Bacchus (cf. 7.211–16) are shown on many occasions inspiring various human figures to commit hideous crimes of violence and bloodshed or contriving to create a situation favourable to the perpetration of inhuman deeds. While the awareness of this fact by the audience is bound to arouse its sympathy for the victims of Jupiter's irrevocable plan of destruction, the heavy emphasis laid on harmful divine intervention in his speeches and those of other Olympians in these scenes enhances the sub-theme of supernatural malevolence and injustice and contributes significantly to the oppressive and despairing mood of the poem.

Concilia Deorum *in Epic: Homer to Statius*

Jupiter convenes a council of the gods in *Thebaid* 1.197ff. in order to proclaim his policy concerning the fate of Thebes and Argos; at another council in *Thebaid* 3.218ff. he commands Mars to incite Argos to war against Thebes. The scenes are modelled upon and allude to the *concilia deorum* in the epics of Homer, Vergil,[15] Ennius,[16] and

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[14] *Contra* Burck (1953: 704), who asserts precisely the opposite.

[15] Cf. Juhnke (1972: 54–59) on *Theb.* 1.197ff., (1972: 79–81) on 3.218ff.

[16] Only five lines of Ennius' *concilium deorum* in the *Annals* are extant (1 frr. 30–33 [Skutsch 1985]), so little, if anything can be ascertained concerning the rôle of the various gods in the Ennian council. Waszink (1957: 324f.) proposes that Neptune spoke openly against the founding of a second Troy in Latium, and Feeney (1984: 179ff., esp. 190f.; 1991: 125) suggests that Juno may have also spoken against the Trojans.

especially Ovid.[17] As the divine council is a conventional literary theme that epic poets employ for a variety of purposes, it is important to consider briefly how these epicists handle the theme.[18]

Prior to the first council of the gods in *Iliad* 1.553ff., Thetis approaches Zeus subserviently and supplicates him to effect what her son Achilleus desires (1.503–10, 514–16); he eventually accedes to her request (518–27). However, Hera perceives what he is planning and protests vehemently when a council of the gods is convened (539–43, 551–58). Zeus becomes exasperated and blurts out that she is imperiling her physical well-being with her impertinent outburst (561–67). The significant point here is that Hera behaves as an uncompassionate member of the Olympian family; even the affliction of one of her fellow gods fails to excite any feeling of sympathy in her. The scene is similar to the one portrayed in *Il.* 4.1ff., where Zeus' comments spark strong protests from Athene and Hera (7–67); eventually Zeus instructs Athene to incite the Achaeans and Trojans to battle (69–72). During the assembly convened by Zeus in *Iliad* 8, Zeus enjoins non-interference on the gods so that he can discharge his obligation to Thetis (5ff.). He brings to bear the full weight of his authority upon the council and issues a warning that any god who contravenes his imperial command will be banished to Tartarus (10–16). The gods acknowledge Zeus' power to fulfil his threat, although Athene dares to reply by expressing her sense of loss at the fate of the Danaans (31–37). At the beginning of *Iliad* 20, Poseidon has the boldness to enquire of Zeus why he has convened an assembly (16–18). At divine assemblies in *Odyssey* 1 and 5, Athene complains to Zeus that Odysseus is being made to suffer undeservedly through his enforced stay on Calypso's isle (1.44–79; 5.7–42); in both scenes her words earn a mild rebuke from Zeus, although he prophesies the safe return of Odysseus to his homeland (1.64–79; 5.8–27).

The council on Olympus in *Aeneid* 10.1–117 is an obvious imitation of the Homeric councils of the gods (*Il.* 8.1ff.; cf. 4.1ff., 15.1ff., 20.1ff.). The assembly achieves little except to create a forum for the rival

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[17] See below, p. 164.

[18] Notable *concilia deorum* appear in Hom. *Il.* 1.494–600; 8.1–40; 20.1–30; *Od.* 1.26–95, 5.1–42; Verg. *Aen.* 10.1–117; Ov. *Met.* 1.163–261; Val. flac. *Argon.* 1.498–573; Sil. Ital. *Pun.* 3.557–629; see also Claud. *De Raptu* 3.1–66 and Sidon. *Pan. Avit. Aug.* 1.17–602, where the descriptions of divine councils closely follow Statius' in the *Thebaid*. The *concilia deorum* of these poets form a part of a long epic tradition of *concilia deorum* extending well over a thousand years in classical antiquity.

factions backing the Trojans and Latins to vent their frustrations publicly. Jupiter in disgust declares that he will not intervene and will allow the Fates to determine the result (104–13, esp. 112f.) but, as revealed in his subsequent actions (e.g., 10.436–38, 11.901, 12.843–54) and words to Juno (12.793–806, 830–40), he does not fulfil his pledge of noninterference.

The divine council in *Metamorphoses* 1.163–261 differs markedly in tone from the atmosphere of the uproarious divine assemblies in Homeric and Vergilian epic. In the Ovidian scene the Fates are clearly subject to Jupiter, as he is shown decreeing the destiny of mankind (209–43, esp. 240–43). Jupiter asserts that he has already blasted Lycaon and his household with his thunderbolt (230f.) and metamorphosed this human into a wolf (232–39; cf. 209) as punishment for his attempts to murder and trick him into eating human flesh (224–30; cf. 197f.); however, he decrees that the entire human race must suffer as well (242). Jupiter attempts to give the impression that he is left with no choice but to annihilate humankind, so ubiquitous is the wickedness of the race (cf. 240–43), but there is no suggestion of any other attempt on his part to curb by less drastic means the criminality he imputes to man. Although he asserts that human evil is pervasive (241) and therefore all men and women are capable of having plotted Lycaon's crime (242), there seems to be no justifiable reason why the other members of the royal house and the rest of the humanity should be made to suffer for the crimes of one person. Indeed the narrative hints that Jupiter is using the banquet of Lycaon as an excuse to vent his general feelings of animosity against the human race: *ingentes animo et dignas Iove concipit iras* ('he conceived a monstrous anger in his heart worthy of Jove', 166). The decision of Jupiter to destroy the human race meets with the enthusiastic approval or silent consent of the other Olympians and lesser deities (244f.; cf. 199–206). There appears to exist a unanimity of feeling among the gods at this council, but it is clear by his authoritarian presence that Jupiter would command their absolute respect even if this were not the case (cf. 167, 177–80, 205–08).

The picture that Homer and Vergil present in their divine councils is scarcely one of an autocrat ruling without a dissentient voice from the other divinities. The passages illustrate that the epic convention of the divine council compels the participants to express their dissension openly against the king of the gods whenever his will or the course of fate runs counter to their interests. Ovid breaks this convention

because he wishes not only to demonstrate the supremacy of Jupiter but also to show that the rest of the pantheon is in agreement with his decision to annihilate mankind. In the divine councils of the *Thebaid* (1.197–311; 3.218–59), Statius is generally faithful to Ovid's setting and treatment of the theme. At the first Olympian council Juno openly raises her voice against Jupiter's decree (1.250–82) that he will punish the royal house of Thebes and Argos (214–47) and at the second assembly Jupiter pretends that the Fates are responsible for the war in the *Thebaid* (3.241–43; 7.197f.), but his actions and various references in the narrative demonstrate that he is in total command of both situations. In the second council (3.218–59), there is not even a hint of dissension among the gods, so overwhelming is the presence of Jupiter and the force of his commands (cf. 253–59). As in the *Metamorphoses* with regard to humanity as a whole, there seems to be no justification in the *Thebaid* for the death and suffering to be endured by the Theban and Argive races on account of a few of their members, whose crimes in any case are either committed unintentionally, motivated primarily by the supernatural powers, or have already been avenged (cf. *Theb.* 1.227–47). Despite the dissent of Juno, the universal pre-eminence of Jupiter is suggested in these scenes as it is in the *Metamorphoses*.[19] In describing the first council Statius creates an Olympian setting whose oppressive and frightful atmosphere resembles that of the divine assembly in Ovid.

*First Olympian Council (*Theb. *1.197–310): The Plan of Jupiter*

From the outset of the programmatic first Olympian council (1.197–310) Statius is careful to establish an atmosphere of sublimity and deference. The king of the gods enters the hall in a dignified and majestic manner; the great Olympians tremble in fear, so overwhelming is their respect for him (201f.). Jupiter views the entire world before him as he moves his way loftily among the gods. All wait in awe for him to sit before he calmly bids them with an imperial wave of

[19] The presence of Jupiter in the divine councils of Silius Italicus and Valerius flaccus is also commanding: in *Pun.* 3.557–629 Jupiter gives the impression that the fate of Rome and her people is already determined (cf. 3.571–629) and that he is the supreme arbiter of Roman destiny (cf. 3.573f.); a similar scene in *Argon.* 1.498–573 establishes that Jupiter exerts absolute control over the Fates and the destiny of the Roman race (cf. 1.531–39, 563–67, esp. 534–36, 555f., 558–60, 565f.; cf. 500–02, 505).

the hand to take their seats (203–05). Next the lesser deities—the demigods, Rivers and Winds—fearfully assume their places (205–08). The physical surroundings are tremulously resplendent:

> mixta conuexa deorum
> Maiestate tremunt, radiant maiore sereno
> Culmina et arcano florentes lumine postes.
> (*Theb.* 1.208–10)
> The intersecting vaults of the gods
> Tremble with majesty; the heights gleam with a greater
> Brilliance and the portals bloom with a mystic light.

One perhaps feels at first with Statius that the description of the *concilium deorum* is of paramount significance here; as would be expected of a poet steeped in the rhetorical tradition of the postclassical period, he takes full advantage of the easy opportunity for elaborate description and rhetorical expansion afforded by the scene. The slow rhythm of the lines due to the predominance of long syllables and the alliteration of *m* and *n* sounds produce a sonorous effect, thereby enhancing the atmosphere of physical grandeur suggested by the description. Certainly the description provides a setting for the narrative, but it is ancillary to the main purpose of portraying Jupiter as an omnipotent and fearsome deity. The picture that emerges of Jupiter is one of a monarch ruling peremptorily and with unruffled calm in a majestic setting. Resembling the Ovidian depiction of Jupiter, this portrayal of the divine monarch contrasts markedly with the comparatively neutral or ironic descriptions of the deity in similar settings in Homeric and Vergilian epic.

This unfavourable impression of Jupiter is confirmed and in fact enhanced by his portrayal as an omnipotent tyrant in the policy speech that follows (214–47). Jupiter's 'great argument' takes the form of a theodicy in which he attempts to assert his providence and justify his plan to the other gods of punishing mankind for its transgressions. Contending that the inherent criminality of man is deserving of divine retribution, Jupiter betrays an unremitting hostility toward humanity and an intention of effecting the partial destruction of the human race (241–43, 245f.; cf. 291f.). Jupiter claims that he has wearied of venting his rage upon man with his thunderbolt:

> 'taedet saevire corusco
> Fulmine . . .'
> (*Theb.* 1.216f.)
> 'It wearies me to vent my rage
> With the flashing bolt . . .'

These words are disturbing, for they suggest an inherent disposition toward violence, a tendency that the ruler of the cosmos attempts to mask in the lines that follow. Jupiter tells the gods how humankind has failed to learn from his deflagration and inundation of the earth (219–23); therefore he resolves to extend punishment to the Theban and Argive houses sired by him because of their proclivity to sin and evil:

> 'Nunc geminas punire domos, quis sanguinis auctor
> Ipse ego, descendo. Perseos alter in Argos
> Scinditur, Aonias fluit hic ab origine Thebas.
> Mens cunctis imposta manet.'
>
> (*Theb.* 1.224–27)
>
> 'Now I descend in punishment on two houses, whose blood-stock
> I myself am father. One branches off to Persean
> Argos; the other flows from its source to Aonian Thebes.
> In all the inbred nature remains.'

Jupiter's claim that the Theban and Argive races have a genetic predisposition toward criminality and immorality (227) is actually an indictment of himself, since he created the races that according to him possess an inherited predisposition toward evil (cf. 2.434f.; 11.210ff.); if what Jupiter says is true, then man is actually being made to suffer for the wrongs committed as the result of a tainted bloodline inherited from the gods.

But the issue is more complex and damning with respect to the higher powers than this. The references of Jupiter to Cadmus' massacre of the armed warriors who sprang up from the furrows (227f.), the crimes of women (such as Agave, who murders Pentheus) whose minds are possessed by Bacchus (229–31), the patricidal and incestuous deeds of Oedipus (233–35), the impious action of Eteocles and Polynices in trampling on their father's *cadentes oculos* ('fallen eyes', 238f.), and the crime of Tantalus in dismembering, boiling and serving his son Peleus to the gods (246f.) are intended to serve as examples of human wickedness deserving of divine retribution. However, the past crimes catalogued by Jupiter were either perpetrated unknowingly by various human figures, were instigated largely by the gods, or have already been avenged.[20] In fact some of the crimes to which he alludes actually

[20] Cf. *Theb.* 1.709–15; 3.180–205; 4.553–78 for the similar catalogues of Adrastus, Aletes and Manto, respectively. As the mythological figures mentioned in these catalogues suffer especially harsh fates at the hands of the higher powers, the catalogues recall the divine ill will toward Thebes and Argos in the past and anticipate the continued hostility of the gods toward the cities in the future.

demonstrate the innocence of man. The fates of Cadmus and Agave are more the result of divine malevolence than any propensity of the pair to irrationality or neglect in paying homage to the gods. Since *funera Cadmi* ('Cadmus' bloodshed', 227) and *mala gaudia matrum* ('the evil joys of mothers', 229) are crimes performed by Cadmus and Agave under divine influence (and therefore are more the responsibility of the gods than of Cadmus or Agave), the ambiguous expression *deorum crimina* ('crimes of [or against] the gods', 230f.) actually suggests the idea of divine criminality rather than merely the superficial perpetration of crimes against the gods by such figures as Niobe and Pentheus.[21]

There is no apparent justification for the suffering of the innocent descendants of these figures, whose violent actions are inspired by the vindictiveness of deities hostile to the human cause. The list of crimes presented by Jupiter as deserving of divine retribution actually undercuts, rather than supports, his argument. If Jupiter wished to destroy only Eteocles and Polynices, he could easily do so with a single stroke of lightning, as he demonstrates when he strikes Capaneus a fatal blow during the maddened warrior's challenge of his authority (10.899ff.; cf. 5.583–87). In the long line of the Theban house Oedipus is perhaps as guiltless as anyone, since he commits his crimes unknowingly (cf. 1.233–35). And Jupiter's reason for punishing Argos—Tantalus' act of impiety (246f.)—is specious, because the omnipotent deity has already inflicted a harsh punishment on Tantalus. This can only leave the impression upon the reader that Jupiter's involvement of Argos in the fate of Thebes is an arbitrary, perhaps even capricious, act of unwarranted cruelty. His argument, which is based on the necessity for exacting divine retribution for human sin (cf. 214ff.), sorely fails to convince.[22] If anything, Jupiter merely demonstrates the need

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[21] *Contra* Mozley (1928a: 356f.), who suggests the latter and remarks that 'it is difficult to see what the other [meaning] could refer to'.

[22] However, critics have failed consistently to look beneath the surface of Jupiter's speech. Watkiss (1966: 199ff.) sees the decision of Jupiter to punish Argos and Thebes only in the favourable light of an alleged concern to preserve earthly piety and punish the inherent wickedness of man. Vessey (1973: 82ff.) too is preoccupied with the theme of divine retribution and fails to perceive the disturbing implications of Jupiter's speech. Vessey (1973: 85) also mistakenly maintains that Jupiter is merely putting into execution the decree of Fate in taking this first step toward punishing Thebes and Argos; however, as *Theb.* 1.212f. makes clear, it is Jupiter who is exercising control over Fate at this point of the narrative. Such basic errors follow from a misreading of the text and what would almost seem an intentional failure to observe or treat those aspects of the work that do not accord with the particular viewpoint being advanced.

for supernatural self-retribution. If we are prepared to believe Jupiter that man is inherently wicked and is to be held responsible for the crimes he commits, then man is being punished for a genetic predisposition that is directly traceable to the divine ruler. Human communities are being punished for the transgressions of a few men and women who are largely the innocent victims of harmful supernatural intervention. Even if we should accept the judgement of Jupiter on the guilt of these men and women, there appears to be no justification for extending retribution to the entire Theban and Argive communities. In any event, what emerges essentially is that Jupiter is punishing man for crimes that are largely the responsibility of the gods, including himself. So Jupiter actually directs retribution against man instead of himself and his fellow divinities.

Jupiter further argues that the action of Polynices and Eteocles in trampling on their father's eyes is an unprecedented act of impiety (*facinus sine more*, 238). He decides to grant Oedipus' wish for vengeance against his sons, in part as a reward for the former king's expiation of his sins (236–41). Jupiter decrees:

'Noua sontibus arma
Iniciam regnis, totumque a stirpe reuellam
Exitiale genus.'

(*Theb.* 1.241–43)

'I shall incite the guilty realm
To new strife, and I shall pull up from its roots
The whole deadly race.'

This is the first qualification of his earlier proposal (224–26); the second comes immediately afterward when he resolves to use the marriage of Argia, Adrastus' daughter, to Polynices as a means of inciting hostilities between Thebes and Argos (243–45). Jupiter does not need to conclude his argument through encapsulation, for he has made clear his policy of divine retribution. That he feels compelled to overjustify his granting of Oedipus' request—itself supernaturally inspired (cf. 51f.)—suggests an implicit awareness on his own part of the unwarranted nature of his action.

Juno protests vigorously against Jupiter's command that Argos be punished (250ff.). First the queen of the gods invokes Jupiter as *o iustissime diuum* ('o most just of the gods', 250). The elements of this address are formulaic: there is the *captatio benevolentiae* and a reference to the specific quality (*iustitia*) to which the speaker appeals. But the superficiality of the invocation is suggested even before it is spoken:

Juno is wounded and deeply incensed by her husband's words (248f.). Given her emotional state and criticism of Jupiter in the speech that follows, Juno's address seems sarcastic rather than deferential.[23] The goddess reminds Jupiter of her support for Argos despite his slaying of the herdsman Argos and seduction of Danaë (251–56). She is willing to pardon his secret union with Semele (256–58) but cannot sit by idly while he destroys her favourite city (cf. 259ff.). The claim of Juno that Jupiter wields her thunderbolts (*mea fulmina torques*, 'you hurl my thunderbolts', 258) strongly suggests that he has seized forcibly what is rightfully hers for his own destructive use against man. The mention of various figures who in one way or another have experienced Jovian interference in their lives to their detriment draws attention to the animosity of Jupiter toward man, his careless unconcern for human well-being, and his purely destructive aspect. Juno is succinct and to the point: Thebes can atone for her crimes, but there is no reason for Argos to be singled out for destruction (*facta luant Thebae: cur hostes eligis Argos?*, 'Let Thebes atone for her crimes; why do you choose Argos as her foe?', 259). She argues that her other places of worship—Sparta, Samos and Mycenae—might just as easily be implicated in the fate of Argos (260–62). Juno's mention to Jupiter of these alternative sites on which he could vent his destructive anger suggests the insincerity of her own argument, which is based primarily on the principles of natural justice; her plea in fact demonstrates that she is more interested in her own cause than in justice. The goddess is concerned for Argos because it is her favourite city and she seems willing to sacrifice other cities that claim her as their patron in order to save it from destruction.

Jupiter's selection of Argos is so capricious, Juno feels, that it is a wonder she is worshipped at all in any of her cities (cf. 262–65). Her defence of Argos is based primarily upon the argument that if Jupiter wishes contemporary man to expiate the crimes of his ancestors, then no single state or man on earth is undeserving of punishment:

> 'Quod si prisca luunt auctorum crimina gentes
> Subuenitque tuis sera haec sententia curis,
> Percensere aeui senium, quo tempore tandem
> Terrarum furias abolere et saecula retro
> Emendare sat est?'
>
> (*Theb.* 1.266–70)

[23] The address can scarcely be sincere, as is suggested in the failure of a critic such as Watkiss (1966: 201f.) to remark on its ironic undertone.

'If now these races pay for the crimes of ancestors
And this resolve comes late to your mind to review
The ages of old, what time is removed enough
To destroy the madness of the world and to purge
The far-distant ages?'

Juno proceeds to catalogue states and regions no less deserving of punishment than Argos on account of the crimes of their forebears—Arcadia, Pisa, Ida and Crete (273–79). She concludes her speech with an appeal for compassion on the Argive race and a reiteration of her important point that there are many other states whose crimes demand retribution according to the criteria established by Jupiter (280–82; cf. 266–70).

A skilfully improvised rebuttal of Jupiter's implication of Argos in the destruction of Thebes, the speech of Juno contains a sizeable element of self-interest in the concern she displays for her favourite city (cf. 259–65, esp. 262–65), but the main thrust of her argument is designed to stress the arbitrariness—and hence injustice—of Jupiter's destruction of the Argive race. She does not attempt to excuse Argos for the crimes of her ancestors—although, as shown above, she could do so with considerable justification—but merely questions the justice of singling out for punishment the present-day inhabitants of a city who are innocent of any wrong-doing. It is an argument against which Jupiter has no adequate defence; he feebly replies that Juno's objection to his divine plan was not unexpected, but ignores the substance of her argument.[24] Unlike the Jupiter of Vergilian (*Aen.* 12.791–842) and (apparently) Ennian epic (*Ann.* 1 frr. 30–33, esp. 32 [Skutsch 1985]),[25] the Jupiter of the *Thebaid* is not interested in accommodation with his divine consort.

Jupiter's abrupt dismissal of Juno's plea for mercy upon a race descended from his seed demonstrates not only his indifference to the merit of the main thrust of her argument but also his lack of compassion and concern for natural justice. Claiming that Venus and Bacchus would argue in a similar manner on behalf of Thebes if

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[24] Ahl (1966: 120f.) argues that Juno 'has no interest in justice' and that her motives 'are *utterly* selfish' (my emphasis), yet acknowledges the logic of the argument she puts forward in *Theb.* 1.266–72 and notes Jupiter's weak and evasive reply (cf. 1.285–89). Vessey (1973: 83) concedes that Juno's reply to her husband's speech is a clever speech of rhetoric, but fails to acknowledge the merits of her argument.

[25] On the reconciliation of Jupiter and Juno in *Aeneid* 12 and their likely accommodation in *Annals* 1, see the useful comments of Feeney (1984: 179–94).

they were given the opportunity (*Theb.* 1.285–89),[26] the king of the gods swears that his oath to punish Thebes and Argos is irrevocable (290–92). He orders Mercury to convey the message to Pluto that the spirit of Laius be allowed to ascend to the world above so that he can incite Eteocles to violate the compact of alternate rule he has made with Polynices (292ff.). Jupiter observes that the spirit of Laius will find it easy to convince Eteocles that he should retain the throne:

> 'Germanum exilio fretum Argolicisque tumentem
> Hospitiis, quod sponte cupit, procul impius aula
> Arceat, alternum regni infitiatus honorem.'
> (*Theb.* 1.299–301)
> 'Let the accursed keep his brother, bold in exile and prideful
> Due to Argive friendship, far from his court—this he desires
> On his own—and refuse the alternate honour of kingship.'

Jupiter suggests that Eteocles would (want to) deny Polynices the throne without his intervention. If this were really the case, there would be—naturally but paradoxically—a harmony between the will of Eteocles and the destiny that Jupiter marks out for him. Jupiter would like the other deities to believe that, even without his intervention in the affairs of the brothers, Eteocles would attempt to retain the throne.

However, this is not the impression that Statius attempts to convey early in the poem.[27] The narrative portrays Eteocles as a victim of forces beyond his control:

> pro gnara nihil mortalia fati
> Corda sui!
> (*Theb.* 2.92f.)
> Ah! for mortal hearts unaware
> Of their destiny!

And the shade of Laius rebukes him for his inactivity and apparent lack of concern for his own safety:

[26] Later Bacchus does make an impassioned plea to Jupiter on behalf of Thebes (*Theb.* 7.155–92). Venus does not address Jupiter directly, but she does make a plea for Thebes to Jupiter's *agent provocateur* Mars (3.269–91) and protests over Diana's involvement in the war against Thebes (9.825–30).

[27] *Contra* Ahl (1986: 2852), who argues that 'what the brothers are destined to do is what they want to do anyway' and that 'external forces cannot operate unless the individual is predisposed to behave as required'. This is precisely what Jupiter would have his Olympian audience believe; it is also what a human such as Oedipus *does* believe (cf. 1.85–87).

'Non somni tibi tempus, iners qui nocte sub alta
Germani secure iaces . . .'

(*Theb.* 2.102f.)

'This is no time for you to sleep, sluggard, who in the dark night
Lie unanxious about your brother . . .'

Clearly Eteocles is not intending at this point to undertake any action to deprive his brother of the throne and it is only the direct intervention of Jupiter and the Furies that brings the pair into conflict. Even though Jupiter would have his audience believe that mankind has an inherent disposition toward the perpetration of evil (cf. 1.227), the concluding line of his reply to Juno's objection to his plan (significantly the final words of the entire scene) places responsibility for the events to take place squarely on his shoulders: *certo reliqua ordine ducam* ('I shall lead on the rest in due order', 1.302.)

Statius intends that his audience side with Juno and this is why he has her speak more convincingly than Jupiter. Her speech successfully undercuts the apparent sincerity of Jupiter's attempt to defend his arbitrary punishment of the innocent Argive citizenry. Notwithstanding any possible degree of guilt that should be attributed to some of the human figures inculpated by Jupiter, there still remains the burning (if modern) question of why the guiltless descendants of these figures should be made to suffer for the crimes of others. What seems apparent is that the concept of divine 'justice' does not take into account the degree of human accountability in the perpetration of a criminal act, only the fact that an offence has occurred and retribution is required. Thus human beings are often made to suffer for the crimes of the gods. While the poet's use of a political debate provides the ideal forum in which to expose the particular injustice of the plan to punish Argos, the Olympian speeches become the vehicle by which the general theme of Jupiter's manipulation of events on earth becomes apparent.[28] In this way there is implicit condemnation of the supreme ruler and the sub-theme of supernatural injustice is advanced. Statius' adoption and expansion of the traditional theme of the *concilium deorum* does much to enlarge the perspective of his work. The Olympian setting and speeches enhance the central thematics of the epic through a vivid illustration of Jupiter's supremacy over the other divine powers and his control over fate and human destiny.

[28] Although of course the Furies, *agents provocateurs* of Pluto (cf. *Theb.* 8.69ff., 751ff.; 10.831ff.; 11.85ff., 387ff., 661ff.), have already assumed a rôle in motivating Oedipus' curse (cf. 1.51f.).

The Legacy of Power: Aletes Speaks Out

The aged Aletes' catalogue of the past misfortunes of Thebes (3.180–205) enhances this impression of supernatural hostility toward and control over mankind. In his consolatory speech to the relations of the Theban warriors (179–213), who were slain by Tydeus after being sent to ambush the hero (2.538–681), he blames the Fates for the past afflictions of Thebes (3.179f.). He recounts the adverse circumstances that have plagued Thebes since its portentous founding when Cadmus sowed the earth and the warriors who sprang up from the furrows turned upon each other (180–83): the deceit of Juno—whom Aletes describes as *iniqua* ('unjust', 184), the narrative elsewhere as *fallax* ('lying', 2.292)—in persuading Semele to request Jupiter to reveal himself in his true form, whereupon she was destroyed by his thunderbolts (3.183–85; cf. 2.71–73); the slaying of Learchus by his father Athamas, who was maddened by Juno (3.185–88); and the killing of Pentheus by his mother Agave, who was driven mad by Dionysos (188–90). Reference to Cadmus' sowing of the earth has not only been made earlier by Jupiter at the divine council (1.227f.) but also just afterward by the anonymous Theban critic (180–85), who attributes the present misfortune of Thebes in having to endure the vagaries and uncertainties of alternate rule to the Fates (173–78) and the will of Jupiter (178–80). Wondering aloud if Cadmus' action has doomed Thebes to eternal civil discord (180–85), the anonymous critic can see no justification for the suffering brought about by alternate rule, a policy that the narrative reveals is supernaturally motivated (cf. 123ff., 138f.).

According to Aletes, only the slaughter of Niobe's sons and daughters by Apollo and Artemis equals the present tragic circumstances of Thebes (3.191–98). Aletes reiterates that these misfortunes are attributable to the higher powers: *illa tamen superi* ('Yet those ills were sent from the gods above', 201). Other incidents involving Actaeon (201–03) and Dirce (203–05) were engineered by the Fates at the behest of Jupiter:

> 'sic dura Sororum
> Pensa dabant uisumque Ioui.'
> (*Theb.* 3.205f.)
> 'These were the harsh fates
> Allotted by the sisters, and Jove willed it.'

There can be no doubt that Aletes holds the gods, especially Jupiter, directly responsible for the suffering that Thebes has endured in the

past. His criticism is justified, since in most cases the victims are not actually guilty of any crime; even in the case of Pentheus, who suffers a harsh fate for refusing to accept the worship of Dionysos, his punishment—like that of the Lemnian women who neglect the worship of Venus (5.58ff.)—far outweighs (at least from a modern perspective) the severity of the offence. However, Aletes' attribution of blame to Eteocles for Thebes' present misfortune (3.206–09; cf. 214f.) seems misplaced, since the latent proclivity to violence and vindictiveness of the Theban monarch and his brother are aroused by various supernatural powers on numerous occasions;[29] but of course Aletes cannot know this. At any rate there appears to be little justification for the death and suffering experienced by their innocent compatriots and allies.

Olympian Monarch and Agent Provocateur*: Jupiter and Mars*

This impression of an autocratic ruler presiding over the destruction of Argos and Thebes is enhanced in another important Olympian scene (3.218–59) emphasising Jupiter's ultimate control over proceedings in Thebes and Argos. As he observes the violent and bloody confrontation between Tydeus and Eteocles' troops (218f.)—an incident precipitated by his own intervention (cf. 1.295–301; 3.235f.)—Jupiter summons Mars, who has been in Thrace destroying people and cities (220f.). The description of Mars' attributes as he approaches Olympus stresses his (inherently) violent and destructive nature:

> Turbidus aetherias currus urguebat ad arces,
> Fulmine cristatum galeae iubar armaque in auro
> Tristia, terrificis monstrorum animata figuris,
> Incutiens: tonat axe polus clipeique cruenta
> Lux rubet, et solem longe ferit aemulus orbis.
> (*Theb.* 3.222–26)
> He was madly driving his chariot to the upper heights,
> Causing the light of his helmet's lightning-crest
> And grim golden armour, alive with frightful shapes of monsters,
> To flicker. The open heaven thunders; the light of his shield
> Glistens blood-red; and its emulous orb strikes the far-off sun.

[29] The notable interventions are those of Jupiter (*Theb.* 1.295ff.; 3.235ff.; 7.215ff.), the Furies (1.123ff., esp. 125–30; 7.466ff., esp. 467; 11.57–536, esp. 57ff., 112ff., 136ff., 150ff., 197ff., 387ff., 403ff.; compare the editorial comment of Statius, 11.576; also 11.617ff.; 12.423), Pluto (8.69–71) and the shade of Laius (2.102ff., esp. 123f.).

While the direful Jupiter appears omnipresent, as on the occasion when he seems to pursue individually Argive soldiers who flee in terror before him (11.23–25), or when he praises Ion for overcoming Daphneus (8.453–55), Mars is frequently shown acting on behalf of Jupiter in his rôle of *agent provocateur.* Here the war-god's apparently senseless devastation of Thrace—no reason is given for his destructive activity—corresponds to the important rôle he plays in bringing about the destruction of Thebes and Argos. The portrayal of Mars' horrific destructive power implicates Jupiter directly in the death and suffering that will occur in the forthcoming war between Thebes and Argos, since Mars is consistently shown to be acting under his direct orders.

In fact Mars is one of the most frightening deities in the *Thebaid.* On numerous occasions he is shown destroying nations or inflaming people to violence (e.g., 3.577–93; 7.81–84, 105–39, 234–36; 9.566f.; cf. 7.22–25, 172–74, and the frightful *ekphrasis* of Mars' palace, 41–62), often at the bidding of Jupiter (e.g., 3.575–77; 7.10–33, 81) and certainly to his pleasure (e.g., 7.84f., 236). Elsewhere the war-god lays waste to the cities and inhabitants of Thrace (3.220f.); descends upon Argos to provoke the inhabitants to a furious war-lust (3.420f.); threatens Fama with his Scythian spear in order to coerce her into spreading rumours about the impending war (3.430f.); instigates the Argives to a furious war-lust through the agency of Pavor (7.108–44, esp. 131–39); infuses Amphiaraus with a mad desire for martial violence (7.703f.; cf. 695–98);[30] arouses the Theban and Argive forces against each other (8.383–87); assists Thebes by forcing the departure of Diana from the battlefield (9.831–40); and incites Dryas against the Argive foe (9.841f.),[31] an intervention that proves fatal to the youthful Parthenopaeus (cf. 867–907) as well as the Theban warrior (875f.), since Diana, addressed by Tydeus elsewhere as *bellipotens* ('powerful in war', 2.716), exacts revenge on him by bringing about his death (cf. 9.665–67), yet another example of malevolent supernatural intervention. These specific acts of Mars demonstrate beyond any doubt that he is represented as a real deity; the objective reality of the war-god is further shown in his fathering of a daughter by Venus (3.269ff.) and his palatial residence in the remote region of Thrace (7.33ff.,

[30] *Contra* Klinnert (1970: 135), who curiously argues against the text that Amphiaraus joins intentionally in the fighting.

[31] In *Theb.* 6.232f. Mars is uncertain which side to favour in battle, but these lines may well be spurious, since they are found only in a few surviving codices.

esp. 41–62). Despite the textual evidence pointing toward the corporeality of Mars, many critics such as Lewis, Schetter, Ahl, Snijder, Vessey, Whitman and Feeney insist on giving a *predominantly* (or even exclusively) psychological, figurative or allegorical interpretation of the war-god.[32]

As Mars stands before Jupiter panting and with his sword dripping blood from his slaughter of the Thracians (3.227ff.), the ruler of the cosmos orders him to depart for Argos and incite the city's inhabitants to hatred and martial violence against Thebes (231–33). Again Jupiter is portrayed as an omnipotent and unrelenting power when he allows Mars to inflame the cities to war:

> 'Cui dedimus; tibi fas ipsos incendere bello
> Caelicolas pacemque meam.'
>
> (*Theb.* 3.234f.)
>
> 'To you I've granted this; it's lawful that you consume in war
> The gods themselves and my peace.'

The malevolence of the supreme ruler is further revealed when he is shown to be the direct cause of Eteocles' ambush of Tydeus, which is the incident that sparks Argos to march against Thebes:

> 'iam semina pugnae
> Ipse dedi.'
>
> (*Theb.* 3.235f.)
>
> 'Already the seeds of battle
> I myself have sown.'

Despite this self-incrimination, Jupiter attempts to absolve himself from responsibility by referring to the heinous act he instigates as the crime of Eteocles (235–38).

After commanding Mars to add credibility to Tydeus' tale of slaughter and betrayal (239), Jupiter enjoins non-interference on the gods (239–41), telling them that no amount of effort or attempt at persuasion can alter the course of destiny (241–43). The impression conveyed is of a divinely engineered plan for the destruction of Thebes and Argos. Jupiter's threat to destroy single-handedly the two cities if any gods intervene in his scheme enhances this atmosphere of inevitable doom and destruction:

[32] Lewis (1936: 50f.), Schetter (1960: 8), Ahl (1966: 129, 149), Snijder (1968: 14), Vessey (1973: 86f.), Whitman (1987: 56 [and Venus]) and Feeney (1991: 367–71).

'Quodni me ueterum poenas sancire malorum
Gentibus et diros sinitis punire nepotes
(Arcem hanc aeternam mentisque sacraria nostrae
Testor et Elysios, etiam mihi numina, fontes)
Ipse manu Thebas correptaque moenia fundo
Excutiam versasque solo super Inacha tecta
Effundam turres aut stagna in caerula uerram
Imbre superiecto, licet ipsa in turbine rerum
Iuno suos colles templumque amplexa laboret.'
(*Theb.* 3.244–52)

'But if you do not give me leave to condemn these races
For ancient crimes and to punish their dreadful descendants
(I call as witness this timeless fortress, our mind's sacred shrine,
And the Elysian streams, venerable even to me)
I shall tear down Thebes with my own hands and demolish her walls
To their base, and fling upon the upturned towers
The Inachan houses, or pour down rain and sweep them
Into the dark-blue depths, even if Juno herself, clinging
To her hills and temple, should labour amidst the maelstrom.'

The suggestion that Jupiter is capable of destroying the two cities himself highlights the fact that he does not *directly* foment violence and bloodshed (11.23–25 is a rare exception); rather, he assigns this task to deities such as Mars and Mercury. That he would destroy Thebes and Argos on his own if the gods were to prevent his plan from unfolding is evidence not only of his supreme control over events on earth but also his general vindictiveness, since he could easily single out particular individuals for punishment if he so desired. That he makes no attempt to do so serves to stress his inborn cruelty, arouses sympathy for the innocent victims of his plan, and heightens the oppressive tone of the scene. In fact the outstanding feature of the threat is its tone, which is remarkable for its violent conception and demonstrates the extent of the supreme ruler's uncompassionate and vengeful disposition.

That the scene is intended to serve as yet another illustration of the divine ruler as an omnipotent autocrat is further evidenced in the brief description following Jupiter's speech. The force of his pronouncement is so overwhelming that the assembled deities are rendered motionless:

Dixit, et attoniti iussis; mortalia credas
Pectora, sic cuncti uocemque animosque tenebant.
(*Theb.* 3.253f.)

He spoke, and they were jolted by his decree. One would have thought
Their nature was mortal, so curbed were all in voice and spirit.

These lines suggest that the pacific response of the Olympians and lesser powers is out of character: they respond as if they were humans (i.e., not at all), not gods; not even Juno dares to challenge this time, as she did in the first Olympian council (1.250ff.). The subsequent natural simile is especially effective in stressing the complete dominance of Jupiter over the other gods (3.255–59), a relationship that mirrors the control the divine powers exert over humanity. Jupiter has been described as 'more preposterous rather than sinister', 'an incompetent administrator with enormous destructive power', 'extremely dangerous as well as laughable', 'whimsical' and 'absent-minded'.[33] The ruler of the cosmos is surely powerful and dangerous, but can scarcely be described appropriately as incompetent or risible.[34]

As Mars hastens to carry out Jupiter's command to incite the Argives to war (260ff.), Venus confronts the war-god and attempts to dissuade him from acting unfavourably toward Thebes (cf. 263–91). Mars responds affectionately and ingratiatingly in words (295–303), but his basic nature is never far below the surface, as shown in the use of *Bellipotens* ('War's powerful god', 292; cf. 8.384; 9.832) to refer to him and when he physically hurts Venus with his shield while embracing her (3.293f.); he then proceeds to tell her that he must fulfil his duty in accordance with the admonition of the Fates (304; cf. 316) and the decree of highest Jupiter (304f.). Mars contends that the power of Jupiter is so great that he dare not refuse to execute his commands (306–10); in any event, he asserts, the course set down by Jupiter cannot be altered (311f.), an argument of convenience that resembles the one Jupiter employed earlier (241–43). Mars understands that any attempt to oppose the decree of Jupiter would ultimately prove futile. However, he knows that he has a limited degree of freedom to exercise his power, provided that his actions are in accordance with the will of Jupiter. Therefore Mars is able to promise Venus that he will assist the Theban forces on the battlefield in the forthcoming war with Argos (312–15); while he declares that he can do this because it does not contravene the wishes of the Fates (316; cf. 304f.), the narrative reveals Jupiter as the supreme arbiter of human destiny.

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33 Ahl (1986: 2844, 2847).

34 Nor is it true to say, as Hill (1990: 106) does, that there 'really does seem to be no effective authority in the universe, certainly no coherent plan. . . .'

Although the Olympian councils (1.197ff.; 3.218ff.) establish Jupiter as the prime motivator of the Theban war, the poet is determined to stress this beyond any measure of doubt and so incorporates yet another scene (at the beginning of the second half of the epic) showing him promoting human death and destruction (7.1ff.). The focus of the scene once again is a Jovian command intended for Mars in which the supreme ruler threatens to dispossess Mars of his destructive powers if he does not instigate forthwith the Argive ranks to warfare against Thebes (22–33). Although the Argives are intent on going to Thebes (cf. 6.914–19; 7.100–03), Jupiter is piqued because of their brief stay in Nemea and the apparent inaction of Mars. On two previous occasions Jupiter has commanded Mars to violent purposes: once to descend to earth with the final intention of engendering strife between Eteocles and Polynices (1.292ff.), and another to provoke war between the two cities (3.29–39). The appearance of Jupiter in a scene where he feels that he must once again exhort Mars to fulfil his duty serves to remind the reader of the critical rôle played by him in the events leading up to the war.

Jupiter's reference to the powers and conduct of Mars is illuminating:

> 'At si ipsi rabies ferrique insana uoluptas
> Qua tumet, *inmeritas* cineri dabit impius *urbes*
> Ferrum ignemque ferens, implorantemque Tonantem
> Sternet humi populos miserumque exhauriet orbem.'
> (*Theb.* 7.22–25; my emphasis)
> 'But if his rage and mad joy of the sword were to blaze forth,
> He cruelly will consign *undeserving cities* to ashes
> Brandishing sword and fire, and strike the peoples to the ground
> As they implore the Thunderer, and exhaust the wretched world.'

This imagined scene of desolation is precisely what Jupiter threatens to bring about in his revealing speech before the divine council in *Thebaid* 1.242–46. His words afford a heightened sense of foreboding to the scene, for through the agency of Mars the guiltless citizens of many cities, not only of Thebes and Argos, will die and their homes will be destroyed. This is a direct acknowledgement on the part of Jupiter that his determination to punish Thebes and Argos for the crimes of their ancestors will result in the deaths of many innocent victims. In his speech before the first Olympian council the Jupiter argues that he is punishing Argos and Thebes for crimes allegedly committed by past generations (1.214ff.), yet in this passage his reference to the undeserved suffering of Thebes and Argos—to which

(among other cities) the ambiguous phrase *inmeritas urbes* ('undeserving cities', 7.23) surely must refer[35]—exposes the cruelty and injustice of his plan. In spite of his seemingly incomparable powers, the governor of the cosmos seems unwilling—rather than unable—to prevent this needless death and suffering. But he is more than willing to dispossess an extremely powerful deity of his powers if his order is ignored. While Jupiter would have his audience believe that he is peace-loving, indulgent and temperate (cf. 7.195ff.), his claim to such a nature is belied by his actions in the poetic narrative.

Shortly afterward Bacchus entreats Jupiter to spare Thebes and tries to convince him of the injustice of his scheme to eradicate the royal house (7.155–92). Jupiter replies by rejecting the accusation of Bacchus that he has chosen Argos as a foe for Thebes because of Juno's hatred (195–97); rather, he suggests, the immutable decrees of the Fates and the evil deeds of man's ancestors have precipitated war (197f.). Adopting a sympathetic and merciful stance, he maintains that he is sparing of human blood and has seldom used the thunderbolt to assert his supremacy over the earth (199–202). He professes that he is saddened by the loss of so many lives and is annoyed by the need to give so many bodies fresh life (205f.). Furthermore, Jupiter suggests that he is reluctant to punish Thebes and Argos for their crimes (207f.) and says that he will maintain his composure in the face of what he implies are false and hypocritical accusations by Thebes and Bacchus, respectively (209f.; 211–14); finally he suggests that he bears no resentment toward the sons of Oedipus (215f.). However, the episodes Jupiter cites of his retributive rôle in the universe—the annihilation of the Lapithae (203f.), the destruction of ancient Calydon (204f.), the future eradication of the royal house of Thebes (207f.)—tend to undermine considerably the credibility of his comments.

The suggestion of Jupiter that the Thebans are eager to blame the gods for their destiny (209) recalls the sentiment expressed by Zeus in *Odyssey* 1.32–34. In the *Thebaid* Jupiter asserts that the sacrifice of the sons of Oedipus is demanded by the powers of divine and natural law in retribution for the crimes of his Dorian ancestors:

'rogat hoc Tellusque Polusque
Et Pietas et laesa Fides Naturaque et ipsi
Eumenidum mores.'

(*Theb.* 7.216–18; cf. 208f.)

[35] Cf. Burgess (1978: 10).

> 'Earth and Heaven demand this,
> And Piety, aggrieved Faith and Nature, and the laws
> Of the Furies themselves.'

Jupiter suggests that Bacchus has little basis for arguing his case for Thebes on moral grounds, since Pentheus endured a harsh fate for committing a crime less serious than those perpetrated by Oedipus, yet Bacchus did not mourn or protest his death (211–14). In fact Bacchus' inciting of the Theban women to their gruesome dismemberment of Pentheus is yet another instance of supernatural cruelty where the punishment (from a modern standpoint) appears to exceed by far the magnitude of the offence committed.

Jupiter does offer some measure of consolation and assurance to Bacchus by telling him that he has decided Thebes will survive for the time being, although Argos will not go unavenged:

> 'non hoc statui sub tempore rebus
> Occasum Aoniis, ueniet suspectior aetas
> Vltoresque alii.'
>
> (*Theb.* 7.219–21)
>
> 'I have not set down this as the time
> For the Aonian kingdom to fall; a worse age shall come,
> And other avengers.'

These lines demonstrate clearly the supremacy of Jupiter over the affairs of men and women (note particularly *non statui*, 'I have not decreed', 219), point toward the supernaturally engineered destruction of Thebes, and belie his earlier assertion that he has no control over the fate of the city. Despite his claims to the contrary, Jupiter is no god of clemency. In view of the unrelenting nature of Jupiter and the harsh inexorability of his plan, it is futile for Bacchus to object to the severe fate that Jupiter has imposed upon Thebes.[36] Jupiter naturally rejects the view that holds the gods responsible for the fate of Thebes and predictably attributes the crimes of the Thebans to the genetic defects of their race (cf. 1.227ff.). But he acknowledges his link by birth with man when he reminds the gods that the houses of Thebes and Argos are descended from him (224f.).

Not only is Jupiter responsible for creating the races to which he imputes considerable genetic defects, but he also does not absolve

[36] Of course Thebes is not defeated in its war with Argos, but the human cost of the conflict seems no less devastating to the Thebans than it is to the Argives; furthermore, not long after its standoff with the Argive forces, the Theban army is routed easily by Athens and its allies.

himself successfully of a significant degree of responsibility for the deaths of innocent victims that occur in the war between Thebes and Argos. Jupiter is scarcely sparing of blood, as he claims, when a great many guiltless citizens on both sides suffer in the fulfilment of his divine plan to extirpate the royal houses of Thebes and Argos. No satisfactory moral defence exists to the argument that in war the innocent must unavoidably suffer as much as the guilty. Consequently, at no point in the epic is Jupiter able to exculpate himself; nor does he really attempt to deal with the issue of his degree of accountability for events on earth beyond alleging feebly—and incredibly—that they are the sole responsibility of the Fates (3.241–43; 7.197f.). The unwillingness of Jupiter to prevent the needless deaths of innocent humans not only exposes his malevolence and injustice but also establishes a bond between the gods and mankind, since the supernatural powers—notably Jupiter and Pluto—depend on these humans not just as mere tools to be employed in the execution of their designs but as essential participants in the unfolding of their plans.

Arguably the most striking example of Jupiter's hypocrisy arises when 'with stern speech' (*toruo ore*, 11.121) he orders a cloud to be spread over the earth just prior to the duel between Polynices and Eteocles so that the Olympian deities will not be able to watch the deathly struggle between the brothers (130f.). Although Jupiter feigns horror at the prospect of such an impious crime being committed (125f.) and declares that the gods must not be contaminated by the sight of the dual fratricide (131–33), he does nothing whatsoever to prevent the duel that his brother and the Furies instigate (cf. 8.69f.; 12.136ff.). Yet he unquestionably possesses the power to prevent the fratricide from occurring. When Capaneus mocks the fulgurous deeds of Jupiter (10.902–906), the monologue of the deity shows him responding calmly to the threat, supremely confident in the fulminous power he wields. As Tisiphone seeks to rouse Megaera before the fratricide (11.62ff.; cf. 57–61), Jupiter, unsure of her intentions, looks again for his thunderbolts (68), ready to inflict harm on any actual or perceived threat to his sovereignty.

Cosmocrator and 'Destiny': Jupiter and the Fates

After the gods convene in the first Olympian council, Jupiter orders the terrified assembly to be silent (1.211). As he prepares to speak, the narrative makes clear that his supremacy over the gods and powers

of the universe extends even to his control over the Fates:

> graue inmutabile sanctis
> Pondus adest uerbis, et uocem Fata sequuntur.
> (*Theb.* 1.212f.)
> His sacred words possess authority
> Great and immutable, and the Fates accede to his words.

According to this passage, it is the Fates who follow the lead of Jupiter, who resolves to dispense retributive justice. At this point of the narrative it is clear Statius wishes to portray Jupiter as the pre-eminent power of the universe and not merely as a deity who possesses authority coterminous with the Fates. In fact Statius' depiction of Jupiter as the supreme being in 212f. and 248 (where he is referred to as *pater omnipotens*, 'the all-powerful father') is consistent with his representation of the divinity in other narrative passages. Although later speeches by Jupiter tend to obfuscate *at first* the matter of his precise relationship to these divinities (cf. 3.241–43; 7.197f.), it must be pointed out that the omnipotent portrayal of the divine monarch is directly contradicted *only* by Jupiter himself, whose purpose on two separate occasions is served by playing down his pre-eminence, and by speakers whose requests to other divinities for assistance are more likely to be granted if maximum power and importance is attributed to them.

At the second Olympian council Jupiter points out to the Olympian gods that the course of destiny has been fixed since the beginning of the world:

> 'sic *Fata mihi nigraeque Sororum*
> *Iurauere colus*: manet haec ab origine mundi
> Fixa dies bello, populique in proelia nati.'
> (*Theb.* 3.241–43; emphasis mine)
> 'Thus *the Fates and the black distaffs of the Sisters*
> *Swore to me*: this day remains from the origin of the world
> Fixed for war, and these peoples born to do battle.'

Even here Jupiter suggests his own considerable stature and authority—if not ultimate superiority—in relation to the Fates when he says, *Fata mihi nigraeque Sororum / iurauerunt colus* ('the Fates and the black distaffs of the Sisters have sworn to me', 3.241f.). Critics have accepted without question Jupiter's assertion that the Fates are responsible for the outbreak of war (cf. 1.241–43).[37] Notwithstanding any possible

[37] See, for example, Legras (1905: 168f.) and Vessey (1973: 85f.).

attempt of Jupiter to mislead his divine colleagues, it is apparent that his will and plan for the destruction of Thebes and Argos are identical with those he attributes to the Fates. This has led some scholars to err in suggesting that Statius is holding to the Stoic principle that Jupiter and fate are synonymous.[38] Many have found it difficult to resist imposing upon the framework of the epic the Stoic identification of fate with Jupiter in his rôle as superintender of its unalterable decrees.[39] If this view is accepted and the hour for war was firmly established at the very moment of the world's conception, as Jupiter claims (3.242f.), then the possibility of his attempting to change the course of destiny is removed and he is cleared of all responsibility. Indeed this is precisely what Jupiter would like his Olympian audience to believe, and his purpose is served by feigning impotence at the hands of the Fates. Not only is Jupiter's claim of powerlessness before the Fates undercut in the narrative (cf. 1.213) and never confirmed by other speakers, but the poet generally goes to considerable lengths to represent the Olympian as the supreme power of the universe and to emphasise his paramountcy over the Fates.

Jupiter portrays himself as being subordinate to the Fates on one other occasion in the *Thebaid*. When Bacchus expostulates with Jupiter over the fate of Thebes (7.155–92), Jupiter's reply is imbued with Stoic sentiment:

'inmoto deducimur orbe
Fatorum.'

(*Theb.* 7.197f.)

'We are led by the unchanging wheel
Of the Fates.'

While the narrative immediately preceding the 'grand argument' of Jupiter (1.213) and later references by various speakers to Jupiter establish his universal supremacy (e.g., 3.471, 488), the comments of other figures suggest that he is the co-executor or superintender of fate (e.g., 3.304f., 316; cf. 1.705–07; 3.67–69; 5.735–40, esp. 736, 739f.) but never, as he claims, the subordinate of the Fates. In both situations (3.241–43; 7.197f.) it suits Jupiter's purpose to pretend a certain degree of powerlessness. The sentiment expressed in the

[38] Heuvel (1932: *ad Theb.* 1.213 [*uocem fata secuntur*]) is probably the best example of this tendency to identify Jupiter with fate in the *Thebaid*.

[39] For example, Legras (1905: 168f.), Götting (1969: 69), Vessey (1973: 85f.) and Neri (1986: 1977).

narrative (1.213) is later echoed by the *uates* Amphiaraus, who invokes Jupiter deferentially as *omnipotens* ('all-powerful', 3.471) and *summe sator terraeque deumque* ('the greatest sire of the earth and of the gods', 488), and Eteocles, whose invocation of Jupiter as *summe deum* ('highest of the gods', 11.210) and prayer to him is diverted to Pluto by Tisiphone (205–09, esp. 208f.).

A number of critics argue that Erinys is represented as being even more powerful than Jupiter in the speech of the anonymous shade (*maior Erinys*, 2.20),[40] but this is not the case in the epic as a whole, suggesting that *maior* is to be read either as 'mightier' in relation to the anonymous shade or simply as 'too powerful'. There are a few other supernatural powers who are addressed as supreme beings. Tellus ('Earth') is invoked by the priest Thiodamas as *hominum diuumque aeterna creatrix* ('eternal creatress of men and gods', 8.303). Tiresias addresses a mysterious power as *triplicis mundi summum* ('high lord of the triple world', 4.516). Natura ('Nature') is invoked with the epithet *princeps* ('foremost') by the goddess Pietas ('Piety', 11.466) and Evadne (12.561). As in Amphiaraus' solemn invocation of Jupiter (3.471, 488), these respectful references are made by suppliants in order to increase the likelihood of the gods granting their requests.

The immutability of supernaturally contrived fate is a familiar sub-theme in the *Thebaid*. In *Thebaid* 4 Bacchus reveals an awareness that he cannot change the course of events set down by Jupiter to destroy the Theban race (*exscindere gentem*, 669) but only delay their fulfilment (cf. 677), an idea that is central to the notion of Jovian control of human fate in the epic; so he decides to slow the Argives who are on their way to attack Thebes (677; cf. 686ff.). Jupiter's claim that he is subordinate to the Fates and Bacchus' determination to delay the inevitable are reminiscent of the concept of fate that emerges in the *Aeneid*. In *Aeneid* 7 Juno acknowledges that she cannot prevent the marriage between Aeneas and Lavinia and the alliance between the Trojans and Italians, but she can delay the course of events that will lead inexorably toward the final result (313–16); later Jupiter defers to fate in finding the way to a resolution of the conflict between the two opposing armies of Aeneas and Turnus (10.104–13). Although these passages in the *Aeneid* are imbued with Stoic sentiment, there is no need in the *Thebaid* to attribute the immutability of Jupiter's

[40] Anderson (1924: 203), Mulder (1954: *ad Theb.* 2.20), Hübner (1970: 88), Ahl (1986: 2842).

plan and cunctative aspect of Bacchus' action to Stoic determinism.[41] As Juno can in the *Aeneid*, Bacchus is able to delay the inevitable, but in his case it is not fate but rather the fulfilment of Jupiter's plan that he stalls. In *Thebaid* 9 Diana is told by Apollo that his oracle portends the imminent death of Parthenopaeus (650ff.). After describing what he has foreseen through his own oracle (653–56), the god declares that nothing can be done to change the course of the youth's destiny (659–62). As in the case of Bacchus concerning the fate of Thebes, the circumstances of Parthenopaeus' death can either be forestalled for a while or changed, but the fact of his premature death remains unaltered. The best that Diana can do is to bring her charge a little glory before his death and to exact revenge from his slayer (cf. 663–67).

Olympian Ruler and Human Challenger: Jupiter and Capaneus

Capaneus' challenge to the authority of Jupiter and the Olympian gods during his assault on Thebes is remarkable for its temerity (10.899ff.). Capaneus has been possessed by *furor* ('madness', 832), just as Pluto ordained (cf. 8.75–77), and declares that he has been directed by Virtus ('Virtue') to attack Thebes at the spot where Menoeceus was slain (10.845f.; cf. 834). Encouraged by the widespread devastation he is able to effect, Capaneus belittles the power of the gods and mocks the fulminous deeds of Jupiter. Wondering aloud if there is no patron deity of Thebes that will meet his challenge (899f.), he specifically asks for Bacchus and Hercules (900f.), taunting these gods by referring to them as *infandae segnes telluris alumni* ('sluggish sons of this abominable land', 900). Capaneus argues that any gods of lesser repute are an affront to his standing (901). He ventures to claim that he can withstand Jupiter's burning light and challenges the god directly:

'en cineres Semeleaque busta tenentur!
Nunc age, nunc totis in me conitere flammis,
Iuppiter!'

(*Theb.* 10.903–05)

'See, I possess Semele's ashes and her tomb!
Come now, and strive with all your flames against me,
Jupiter!'

[41] As Vessey (1973: 166) does.

Capaneus then taunts Jupiter by imputing cowardice to him: the hero suggests that the god is braver at frightening Semele and demolishing the Theban walls he helped his father-in-law build (905f.). The demeaning references to Bacchus, Hercules and Jupiter reveal the extent of Capaneus' contempt for the higher powers. Capaneus' temerarious challenge jeopardises the basic principles involved in the relationship between gods and men, as his threatened destruction of Thebes contravenes the course of the war set by Jupiter. The lesser gods are enraged by his arrogance (883–96, 907), but the supremely confident Jupiter merely laughs at him (907f.), expresses amazement that man can be so bold as to challenge his power (909f.), then strikes him down with a single thunderbolt (927–39). Jupiter shows not a trace of pity for a man whose insane action originates in the decree of his brother.[42]

The lines immediately preceding the subsequent arrival of Capaneus in the underworld reveal there is nothing particularly meritorious about his defiance and challenge of Jupiter:

> Postquam magnanimus furias uirtutis iniquae
> Consumpsit Capaneus . . .
> (*Theb.* 11.1f.)
> After high-spirited Capaneus consumed the fury
> Of his wicked valour . . .

Capaneus, however, is warmly received in the underworld by a crowd of infernal powers loyal to Pluto:

> . . . coetu Capaneus laudatur ab omni
> Ditis et insignem Stygiis fouet amnibus umbram.
> (*Theb.* 11.70f.)
> . . . Capaneus was praised by the whole cortège of Dis
> And refreshed his notorious shade in the Stygian rivers.

Despite his favourable reception in the underworld (69–71) and the adjectives describing him as *magnanimus* (1; cf. 9.547) and *insignis* (71), the senseless challenge of Capaneus seems intended not to be viewed as a heroic act.[43] It needs to be stressed that the underworld deities welcome him *only* because of his challenge to Jupiter.

As for the aforementioned epithets, they seem *rather* ambiguous.

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[42] *Contra* Ahl (1966: 106).

[43] *Contra* Burgess (1978: 183), who considers Capaneus' challenge to be 'an admirable act, an assertion of man against a tyrannical god'.

While *magnanimus*[44] ('high-spirited' or 'great-souled')[45] appears to refer as much to his spirited and impetuous qualities (cf. 6.787f.; 7.670–74, where his behaviour is likened to that of the lion and tiger)[46] as to any perceived *greatness* of his soul, just as it appears to in relation to Theseus (12.795) and Domitian (814), *insignis* ('notorious' or 'illustrious')[47] seems to point toward notoriety rather than eminence. Of course to the nether deities Capaneus is indeed 'great-souled' and 'illustrious', while to the upper powers he is (to put it mildly) 'high-spirited' and 'notorious'. In the matter of Capaneus' contempt for all gods and their earthly representatives, such as the priest Amphiaraus, he is shown to be positively irreverent (cf. 3.607–18); however, in the specific instance of Capaneus' injudicious challenge of Jupiter (10.899–906), the cruel indifference of the supernatural powers is evident, since Pluto and Tisiphone are portrayed as the instigators of Capaneus' attack—hence his *uirtutis iniquae* ('unrighteous valour', 11.1)—upon the supreme ruler (8.76f.; cf. 10.832, 836) in retaliation for what the infernal monarch believes is an attack upon his dominion (cf. 8.36f.). The deed is discredited precisely because it recalls the rôles of the infernal deities in engineering and inspiring the challenge (cf. 8.76f.; 10.831–33). That Capaneus gains no small measure of fame from his deed and the grudging admiration of Jupiter (cf. 11.10f.) is scarcely evidence of virtue or real heroism.

While the actions of Capaneus before the walls of Thebes seal his downfall, his earlier conduct has presaged his violent confrontation with the gods. Just prior to this occasion (5.583–87), Capaneus, outraged at the slaying of Opheltes[48] by a serpent sacred to Jupiter (cf. 511–13), declares that it will not escape unpunished no matter whose pleasure it might be (565–70)—even that of the gods (568)—and mortally wounds the serpent (570ff.). Jupiter is scarcely able to control his wrath over the act of Capaneus (585), who is made to feel the potential force of Jupiter's thunderbolt (586f.) in a prefigurement of his fatal clash

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[44] Statius employs this epithet (eighteen times) in the *Thebaid* to refer to warriors during, just before or after battle (2.564 [Pholus=Tydeus]; 4.112; 6.827 [Tydeus]; 9.547; 11.1 [Capaneus]; 10.399 [Aegyptus]; 8.357; 10.662; cf. 12.72 [Menoeceus]; 3.82 [Maeon]); ancestors (3.349; 6.628); kings, princes and the emperor (2.733; 3.55; 5.653; 7.375 [Lycurgus]; 12.795 [Theseus]; 12.814 [Domitian]).

[45] *TLL* 8 (1966: 102f.).

[46] Cf. *Aen.* 3.704, where *magnanimi* ('high-spirited') is used to describe *equi* ('horses').

[47] *TLL* 7.1 (1964: 1901ff.).

[48] Opheltes (*Theb.* 4.723, 742) is also called Archemorus (4.720; 5.609, 739; 6.517), but I have retained the name Opheltes throughout to avoid confusion.

with the ruler of the cosmos in 10.899ff. (esp. 927ff.); however, Jupiter decides to spare Capaneus merely in order to save him for a more severe punishment (583–87). Capaneus challenges the gods in his slaying of the serpent sacred to Jupiter (565–70, esp. 568), but it cannot rightly be deemed a *heroic* act any more than his challenge to the authority of Jupiter. Mortally wounding a sacred serpent (570–78) that, notwithstanding its immense size and menacing aspect (505–33), has *unintentionally* slain a mere infant (538–40) hardly constitutes for a figure of Capaneus' stature a heroic act in itself; accordingly, the poet does not represent it as such.[49] Indeed it is difficult to find anything heroic or virtuous about the deeds that Capaneus performs in defiance of the Olympians. He may not be without admirable qualities, but they do not include his contempt for or defiance of Jupiter and the other Olympians.

Capaneus presents an imposing, even hideous, sight (4.165ff.) as the Argives, inspired by Bellona (5ff., esp. 9–12), assemble for war (13ff.). On the huge shield he bears is a representation of the Hydra (168ff.), image-symbol of death and destruction, which ironically links the *superum contemptor* ('despiser of the gods', 3.602) with such malevolent supernatural powers as Jupiter (5.511f.; cf. 583f.), Mars (3.224; 10.806; 11.489), Tisiphone (11.61, 102, 113), Apollo (1.600; 6.495–501), Minerva (8.763; 12.6608f.) and Venus (5.67f.). The giant on the summit of his helmet (4.175f.) emblematises his destiny by associating him with a figure whose action resembles his unsuccessful challenge of Jupiter (10.902ff.; cf. 909f.). Although Capaneus' direct challenge of the gods, like that of the Giants, appears to achieve nothing except an enduring place in myth, it has been argued that it parallels the suicidal challenges of Coroebus (1.605ff.) and of Maeon (3.53ff.) to cruel authority.[50] However, Coroebus is obviously unaware that his slaying of the monster Poine constitutes a crime in the eyes of Apollo until the god demands retribution for her death (1.634ff.). Coroebus' heroic offer of his life to Apollo is intended to spare his compatriots further needless death and suffering. His slaying of the monster (605ff.) and his prayer to Apollo (643ff.) do not challenge the god's authority, although the youth is extremely critical of Apollo for permitting innocent

[49] *Contra* Burgess (1978: 251), who acknowledges that Capaneus wishes to challenge the gods by killing the serpent, but maintains that Capaneus' action is a 'heroic human challenge to a cruel divine power [Jupiter]'.

[50] Burgess (1978: 400 n. 87).

citizens to suffer (648–57). Although Maeon's challenge of the tyrannical Eteocles is portrayed in heroic terms, it is an action performed independently of divine intervention. Capaneus' supernaturally motivated challenge of the Olympians is entirely selfish and Argos gains nothing of benefit from it. In fact, in the aftermath of the unsuccessful challenge, the Thebans gain a respite and recover sufficiently to drive the Argive forces across the Theban plain (11.18ff.). The fate of Capaneus reveals him as yet another human figure who is driven to destruction by the gods; he is a victim rather than a hero.

Infernal Monarch and Agents Provocateurs: *Pluto and the Furies*

The central focus of a major scene in *Thebaid* 8.1–126 is a speech of Pluto that attests to the vindictiveness of the infernal deity against humanity (34–79). The reader is prepared for his verbal display of antipathy in the description preceding his speech:

> Forte sedens media regni infelicis in arce
> Dux Erebi populos poscebat crimina uitae,
> Nil hominum miserans iratusque omnibus umbris.
> Stant Furiae circum uariaeque ex ordine Mortes,
> Saeuaque multisonas exertat Poena catenas;
> Fata serunt animas et eodem pollice damnant:
> Vincit opus. iuxta Minos cum fratre uerendo
> Iura bonus meliora monet regemque cruentum
> Temperat; adsistunt lacrimis atque igne tumentes
> Cocytos Phlegethonque, et Styx periuria diuum
> Arguit.
>
> (*Theb.* 8.21–31)[51]
>
> By chance the ruler of Erebus, sitting in mid-fortress
> Of his wretched realm, was demanding of the host their life-crimes,
> Pitying nothing human and angry with all the shades.
> Round him stand in rank the Furies and various Deaths.
> And harsh Punishment stretches out her deafening chains.
> The Fates deliver the souls and condemn with the same thumb.
> The task overwhelms. Nearby fair Minos with awesome brother
> Advises a kinder justice and restrains the cruel king.
> Cocytus and Phlegethon, swollen with tears and fire,
> Assist in judging, and Styx censures the perjuries
> Of the gods.

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[51] Compare the similar description of the underworld in *Theb.* 4.525–29.

This passage, which depicts the various infernal powers uniting against and harassing man even after death, conveys the impression of an overwhelming supernatural hostility toward man. Their vindictiveness against the human race and proclivity to injustice is exemplified especially in the actions of Pluto and the Fates. While the Fates lead the souls before Pluto and condemn them even before he can judge them, the grim overlord dispenses his harsh 'justice' without regard to the real innocence or guilt of the souls (8.23, 26–29, 30f.). The river Styx, punisher of perjured deities, accuses the gods of perjury, further suggesting an unfair judgement on the part of the supernatural against insubstantial humanity.

Pluto's subsequent speech is remarkable for its violent conception. When light is admitted into the underworld through a cleft in the earth's surface during the descent of the warrior-prophet Amphiaraus into the underworld (33), Pluto is under the mistaken impression that his sovereignty is under threat from one of his brothers and launches a scathing attack upon them (34–79). He commands Tisiphone to avenge this violation of the underworld by executing four ghastly deeds. These are the fratricide of Eteocles and Polynices (8.69–71; cf. 11.387ff.), the anthropophagy of Tydeus (8.71f.; cf. 8.751ff.; 11.85–88), the decree of Creon outlawing the burial of the Argive corpses (8.72–74; cf. 11.661–64), and Capaneus' challenge of Jupiter (8.76f.; cf. 10.831ff.; 11.88–91).

The aforementioned crimes brought to pass by Tisiphone with the aid of Megaera are pure acts of reprisal instigated by Pluto against his brothers for the intrusion upon his territory; they are certainly not acts 'all commanded by [Pluto] in revenge for *Apollo*'s intervention'[52] (my emphasis). Here Eteocles, Polynices, Tydeus, Creon and Capaneus are portrayed as the unfortunate victims of a long-standing dispute between Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto originating from the brothers' drawing of lots to determine their share of the universe. In his speech Pluto makes no reference to any crime of these individuals that is deserving of divine retribution. Unlike Jupiter, Pluto does not even offer the pretext that these figures deserve to be punished for certain alleged iniquities. His violent treatment of Orpheus and Proserpina is no less unjustified:

> 'Odrysiis etiam pudet (heu!) patuisse querelis
> Tartara: uidi egomet blanda inter carmina turpes

[52] As Vessey (1973: 264) would have it.

Eumenidum lacrimas iterataque pensa Sororum;
Me quoque—sed durae melior uiolentia legis.
Ast ego uix unum, nec celsa ad sidera, furto
Ausus iter Siculo rapui conubia campo.'
(*Theb.* 8.57–62)

'It shames me too (ah!) how to the Odrysian complaint
Tartarus opened; I myself saw the Furies' shameful tears
Amidst the alluring songs and the Sisters' task repeated.
Me too—but the violence of my harsh law was greater.
Yet I have dared only just one journey by stealth, nor was that
To the stars, when I seized my wife from the Sicilian plain.'

These brief references to the failure of Orpheus (57–60) and abduction of Proserpina (61f.; cf. 63f.) further attest to the infernal ruler's ruthless and vengeful nature and thereby intensify the overwhelming impression of supernatural insensibility.[53]

As Pluto finishes commanding Tisiphone and the underworld deities, he is shown having no less an effect on the underworld than Jupiter does on Olympus:

Dixerat: atque illi iamdudum regia tristis
Attremit oranti, suaque et quae desuper urguet
Nutabat tellus: non fortius aethera uultu
Torquet et astriferos inclinat Iuppiter axes.
(*Theb.* 8.80–83; cf. 3.253–59, esp. 253f.)

Thus he spoke. For a long time the dreary empire trembled
At his speech, and his own earth and that which presses on it
From above swayed. Not more strongly does Jupiter
Rock the skies with his look and bend the starry poles.

As Pluto is the infernal counterpart of Jupiter and co-instigator of human violence and destruction, we should not be surprised to see the underworld deity exhibiting some of the same personal characteristics as his brother. Not only does he nod as Jupiter does (8.82f.), but he also thunders in a Jovian manner from the underworld (11.410f.). Pluto is also linked indirectly to Jupiter through Tisiphone, the underworld ruler's chief *agent provocateur*: the Fury is compared with Jupiter's thunderbolt as she enthusiastically sets Oedipus' curse in motion (1.92) and as she rushes to drive Pietas ('Piety'), who attempts to forestall the fratricide, from the battlefield (11.483).

The rôle of Pluto in predetermining the horrible fates of various

[53] *Contra* Mackay (1965: 297), who considers Pluto in this scene and the gods generally to be 'slightly comic'.

figures shows the importance of his position in a universe portrayed as hostile to the human situation. It is partly through the *unwitting* agency of Pluto, who himself acts in concert with the Furies, that Jupiter is able to bring his plan for the extirpation of the royal houses to fruition.[54] Despite the close identification between the pair, some commentators maintain that this underworld scene shows Pluto behaving as if he were Satan, the *Gegengott*; that the underworld resembles the concept of hell; and that a dualism, an opposition between heaven and hell, emerges through an antithetic relationship between Pluto and Jupiter.[55] At first glance this might appear to be the case, since Pluto's command to Tisiphone reveals the determination of the underworld god to challenge the authority of his brother and offend the sensibilities of the Olympians. But to consider Pluto as an anti-god because of his enmity toward his brothers and the Olympian gods, or even to suggest that the pair symbolise the opposition of cosmic good and evil, ignores the purely destructive and malevolent aspects of Jupiter's own personality and his acts of vengeance directed against mankind. The mutual antipathy of Jupiter and Pluto does not mean their characters are any more opposed than those of Eteocles and Polynices. Indeed the characters of the human brothers reflect those of the divine brothers.

That the acts inspired by Pluto and engineered through the agency of the Furies are forced upon their perpetrators is apparent especially in events leading up to the mutual fratricide. The stage is actually set for the calamitous intervention of the Furies when Tisiphone summons Megaera with her kindred snakes in order to seek their assistance in prompting the fratricide (11.57–74). Tisiphone asserts that she instigated Tydeus' horrible act of anthropophagy and Capaneus' defiant challenge of Jupiter (85–91). The Fury assures her sister of the inevitability of the fratricide despite the attempts of the gods

[54] Perhaps this appearance of cooperation is what leads Vessey (1973: 264) to suggest erroneously that Pluto's 'will, in essence, is identical with that of his Olympian counterpart, for both are executors of Fate'. While Pluto displays the same destructive propensity as his brother, he is no more an *executor* of fate than Jupiter, who rather is shown *determining* it (e.g., *Theb.* 1.241–43, 299–301; 3.234–36; 7.219–21).

[55] This is especially popular among German critics, notably Kroll (1932: 443ff. [esp. 450, 453], 455ff.), Schetter (1960: 29), Götting (1969: 69) and Schubert (1984: 128–30). Others who argue for a dualistic approach to the gods in the *Thebaid* are Snijder (1968: 17), Vessey (1973: 264) and Feeney (1991: 350–52). Feeney (1991: 351) asserts: 'Dis in fact emerges as a kind of anti-Jupiter, with his kingdom as an anti-Heaven'.

Fides ('Faith'), *alma* Pietas ('kind Piety', 98f.; cf. 472ff.), the crowd and various members of the human family (mother, sister and father) to forestall the crime (102–08); she and Megaera have only to incite the brothers to violence to bring about their mutual destruction (98f.). The general involvement of Tisiphone in the war to the detriment of both sides is suggested in her boast that she has wrought considerable destruction (81–83), a fact born out earlier in the narrative (57f.) and in numerous other incidents in the poem (e.g., 7.562f.). Tisiphone's observation that Mars and Enyo (Bellona) take credit for her destructive achievements (11.84) serves to enhance the feeling generated throughout the epic of the overwhelming supernatural oppression of humanity.

The Furies unite their horrible powers to influence directly the actions of Polynices and Eteocles. In the long scene leading up to and culminating in the mutual destruction of the brothers (11.57–579), Megaera acts upon Polynices three times and Tisiphone directly interferes with or prompts the action of Eteocles on two occasions. Megaera lashes Polynices and provokes him into desiring the bloodshed of combat and the crime of fratricide (150–54; cf. 109f.); disguised as the Argive Phereclus, the Fury exhorts, arms and bodily throws Polynices on to his horse while overseeing his ride to Thebes to challenge Eteocles (197–204); and she actively opposes the mediatory attempt of Antigone, which has some effect upon him (383–87; cf. 103–05). These and other examples of the supernatural instigation of Polynices demonstrate that he is not 'plunging down the path to self-destruction';[56] rather, the supernatural powers drive the exile remorselessly to his death. The blame accorded to Polynices in the notion that his 'obsession with ruling Thebes wreaks havoc with many lives, including that of Adrastus'[57] is misplaced, since the harmful intervention of the gods, particularly Tisiphone (e.g., 1.123ff.) is shown to be the dominant factor behind the obsessive desire of the exiled prince to rule in Thebes. Tisiphone diverts Eteocles' sacrificial prayer to Jupiter (11.208–09) and violently pushes the monarch through the gates of Thebes to meet Polynices' challenge (387–92). The Furies are then shown driving their charges on to the plain to meet their inescapable destiny (403–06). At the approach of the Furies the war deities Bellona, Mars and Minerva withdraw, while Virtus ('Virtue') remains unsighted (412–15).

[56] So Ahl (1986: 2885).

[57] Ahl (1986: 2899).

Shortly after these events Pietas ('Piety'), a kindly goddess who has distanced herself from most of the other gods physically (cf. 457f.) as well as by her actions, has some success in a final, desperate attempt to prevent the fratricide (as do Fortuna ['Fortune', 447f.] and Fors ['Chance', 481]), but is driven off by Tisiphone (470–95), who had predicted her divine foe's abortive intervention (98f.). Although Pietas is a benevolent goddess associated with the powers of humanity and reason against supernatural forces of inhumanity and irrationality (cf. 457–63), it is significant that she feels compelled to exhort men to wage a profane war in an attempt to prevent the even worse crime of fratricide from being perpetrated. Pietas is momentarily successful, for she has a sudden and dramatic effect on the warriors who become conscious of their crime (474–76).

Tisiphone dashes to the battlefield and enjoins non-interference upon her rival. She claims that the moment is due for violent retribution and that Pietas has procrastinated too long to exert her influence on impending events (485–87). The truculent goddess argues that the series of crimes perpetrated by the Theban house demand natural vengeance:

'ubi tunc, cum bella cieret
Bacchus et armatas furiarent orgia matres?
Aut ubi segnis eras, dum Martius impia serpens
Stagna bibit, dum Cadmus arat, dum uicta cadit Sphinx,
Dum rogat Oedipoden genitor, dum lampade nostra
In thalamos Iocasta venit?'[58]

(*Theb.* 11.487–92)

'Where then were you when Bacchus stirred up war
And the orgies inflamed mothers fitted out with arms?
Where were you lingering, while the snake of Mars drank
The unholy swamp, while Cadmus ploughed, while the Sphinx fell vanquished,
While the father asked Oedipus, while by my lamp
Jocasta approached the marriage-bed?'

This argument resembles the specious claim of Jupiter that the Thebans

[58] The events referred to here are the commencement of the war between Thebes and Argos (*Theb.* 11.487f.), Cadmus' slaying of the serpent who killed his men when they sought water from the serpent's spring prior to the founding of Thebes (489f.), the sowing of the serpent's teeth by Cadmus and the battle that occurred between the men who sprang up from the furrows (490), the sphinx's plunge to death after Oedipus successfully answered the riddle that the beast posed to him (490), the killing of Laius by Oedipus when they met at the crossroads (491), and the consummation of the marriage between Oedipus and Jocasta (491f.).

deserve to be punished for the crimes of their ancestors (1.227ff.).

Tisiphone's reproach drives Pietas from the battlefield (11.492–96); in her absence the fighting resumes with greater intensity (497ff.) until, their purpose accomplished of inciting the brothers to fratricide, the Furies stand back and marvel at the success of their handiwork:

> Nec iam opus est Furiis; tantum mirantur et astant
> Laudantes, hominumque dolent plus posse furores.
> (*Theb.* 11.537f.)
> No more is there need of Furies. They only marvel and stand
> As they praise, and grieve that human madness surpasses their own.

It is ironic that Pietas departs in order to lay complaint before Jupiter about her treatment (496), since he is the prime mover behind the supernatural plan to eradicate the Theban and Argive houses (cf. 1.224ff.). The struggle between Pietas and Tisiphone corporealises the conflict between the forces of civilised humanity and filial piety and the forces of supernaturally inspired anarchy and barbarity. Lewis asserts that the confrontation between the goddesses allegorises the inner struggle between the good and evil aspects of the human soul,[59] but it is more accurate to suggest that the Fury's repulsion of a benevolent deity demonstrates that the ruthless and destructive supernatural powers have prevailed over righteousness and sanity on earth.

Although Pietas justifiably holds Jupiter and the Fates responsible for creating the circumstances that lead to the duel (11.462), the strong impression conveyed is that without the interference of the Furies on these occasions the fratricide would not have taken place; in fact there is no mention of any desire by the brothers to kill each other until the direct intervention of the Furies. Polynices is described as uncertain whether to avoid confronting his brother by dying or taking flight (11.138f.); his initial resolve to fight Eteocles stems from his deep sense of shame and guilt, a genuine remorse for the suffering he has brought to Argos, and a desire for death (cf. 161–187), but he does not at any time entertain the thought of fratricide until set upon by Megaera (197ff.). The exile discerns that the supernatural powers have conspired to implicate him in the doom of Argos:

> 'nec enim omnis culpa malorum
> me penes, et superi mecum Parcaeque nocentes.'
> (*Theb.* 11.188f.)

[59] Lewis (1936: 54; cf. 48ff.).

> 'For not all the blame for these ills belongs
> To me, but the gods and Fates are guilty along with me.'

Polynices' unwillingness to accept the entire blame for the troubles that have plagued Argos since his arrival by rationalising his actions and placing them in a better light is not to be seen merely as an attempt to soothe his troubled conscience and gain the sympathy of Adrastus (cf. 196f.). The machinations of Jupiter and other divinities are all too apparent in the demise of Polynices and the ills that beset Argos. As for Eteocles, he does not contemplate the possibility of meeting Polynices in single combat until Aegyptus brings news of his brother's challenge (cf. 239–50). The reigning monarch hesitates whether to meet his brother and must be goaded by Creon into accepting the challenge (268–306). Even then the duel only takes place when Tisiphone intervenes directly by pushing Eteocles into the fray (387f.).

Jocasta realises, as does Argia (cf. 12.402), that the impending duel between her sons is inspired by one of the Furies who has descended again upon Thebes:

> 'Quis furor? unde iterum regni integrata resurgit
> Eumenis? ipsi etiam post omnia, comminus ipsi
> Stabitis?'
>
> (*Theb.* 11.329–31)
>
> 'What is this madness? Whence rises up again a Fury restored
> Of this realm? You—after everything will you still war with
> Each other?'

The description of Pluto impatient for the duel to occur (410) and the overshadowing presence of the Theban ghosts—themselves the perpetrators of crimes largely instigated by the gods—dispatched by him to view the fratricide (420–23) serve to remind the audience that the infernal lord is ultimately responsible for the ensuing actions of the brothers (cf. 8.69–71).

As in the case of Eteocles and Polynices, the crimes perpetrated by Tydeus, Creon and Capaneus are instigated by the Furies at the behest of Pluto. Tydeus is mortally wounded by Melanippus and makes a plea to his Argive comrades that the head of his slayer be brought to him (8.716–44). He is described as being content merely to gaze upon his foe's head, but Tisiphone compels him to feed upon its grey matter, an action that apparently offends even the sensibilities of Minerva:

laeuaque receptum
Spectat atrox hostile caput, gliscitque tepentis
Lumina torua uidens et adhuc dubitantia figi.
Infelix contentus erat: plus exigit ultrix
Tisiphone; iamque inflexo Tritonia patre
Venerat et misero decus inmortale ferebat,
Atque illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri
Aspicit et uiuo scelerantem sanguine fauces
(Nec comites auferre ualent): stetit aspera Gorgon
Crinibus emissis rectique ante ora cerastae
Velauere deam; fugit auersata iacentem,
Nec prius astra subit quam mystica lampas et insons
Ilissos multa purgauit lumina lympha.
(*Theb.* 8.754–66, esp. 757f.)[60]

Receiving it in his left hand
He beholds the dread visage of his foe and blazes,
Seeing the warm head's fierce eyes still flickering. Miserable,
He was content, but avenging Tisiphone demands more.
And now, her father moved, Tritonia had come,
Bringing her wretched charge everlasting honour.
She sees him, spattered with the gore of the shattered brain,
Polluting his jaws with living blood (his companions have not
The strength to wrest it from him). The fierce Gorgon stood
With bristling hair; horned serpents, erect before her face,
Veiled the goddess. Turning away, she flees him as he lies,
Nor enters the stars before the mystic torch
And pure Elisos with much water purged her eyes.

Tydeus is portrayed here as the piteous victim of Pluto's plan of vengeance directed against Jupiter, which is designed to contaminate his Olympian colleagues, in this case Minerva (8.762–66; cf. 11.119–35).

The action of Tisiphone in carrying out this part of Pluto's plan, which deprives Tydeus of the immortality that Minerva was about to bestow upon him (just as she had conferred a similar honour upon Hercules; cf. 8.509–15), highlights his tragic fate at the hands of malevolent deities. Although great emphasis in the text is placed upon the supernatural motivation of Tydeus' crime, this appears in no way to diminish his responsibility for perpetrating the anthropophagy, as shown later when the Fury, again under orders from Pluto (9.148), engineers the capture of Tydeus' corpse by the Thebans ostensibly as punishment for his crime (148ff., esp. 149f.), further emphasising the ingrained hostility of the infernal deities to humanity. Tydeus is

[60] Cf. *Theb.* 8.71f.; 11.85–88.

punished for a divinely motivated crime as if he were *directly* responsible for its perpetration. He takes the punishment in place of Tisiphone and Pluto. Punishment of man substitutes for the punishment of supernatural powers. The Fury's action in preventing Hippomedon from saving the corpse of Tydeus bears additional witness to the ultimate control of the gods over human activity.

Although Statius portrays Creon's denial of burial to the Argive corpses as typical of the actions of a tyrannical monarch (11.661–64; cf. 11.680f.; 3.96–98), he nevertheless shows that the behaviour of Creon is inspired directly by the Furies in response to the command of Pluto (8.73f.; cf. 12.590f., 184–86). One of Creon's countryman observes in the final book:

'bello cogendus et armis
In mores hominemque Creon.'
(*Theb.* 12.165f.)
'By war and arms Creon must be forced
Into right conduct and being human.'

It is ironic that a war must be waged in order to return Creon to his former (human) self, a self that is rid of the influence of the infernal deities.

Similarly Capaneus' insane challenge of Jupiter is shown to be instigated by the Furies on the order of Pluto (8.76f.; 11.88–91), although at the time of the incident the poet alludes to a number of possible causes:[61]

siue ille profunda
Missus nocte furor, Capaneaque signa secutae
Arma Iouem contra Stygiae rapuere sorores,

[61] Cf. *Theb.* 1.324–28, where the possible cause of Polynices' journey is imputed to Erinys, Fors ('Chance') or Atropos; 2.19–22, where the anonymous shade ponders on whether Jupiter, Erinys or a Thessalian witch is the cause of Laius' ascent to the upper world; 3.60–62, where Maeon advances the gods, Fortuna ('Fortune') and the invincible prowess of Tydeus as possible causes of the annihilation of the Thebans sent to ambush Tydeus; 10.162f., where either Jupiter or Juno are mentioned as inciting the priest Thiodamas to foretell the favourable outcome of an Argive attack at night upon the Theban camp; and 12.420–23, where Fors ('Chance'), divine will, Fortuna ('Fortune') and Eumenis ('a Fury') are given as possible causes of Eteocles' pyre being near Antigone and Argia when the sisters are searching for a fire on which to place Polynices' corpse. The purpose of these (usually tripartite) lists in which human actions are attributed to the causal agency of various supernatural forces is to emphasise the involvement of the gods in the unfolding of events in Thebes and Argos.

Seu Virtus[62] egressa modum, seu gloria praeceps,
Seu magnae data Fata neci,[63] seu laeta malorum
Principia et blandae superum mortalibus irae.
(*Theb.* 10.831–36)

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[62] The epic context demands the slight but important orthographical emendation (for a modern edition) of *uirtus* to *Virtus* (*Theb.* 10.834) and *fata* to *Fata* (835), for the upper-case forms reflect the objective, real-life status of these personified deities in their destructive rôles in the *Thebaid.*

[63] Here *Fata* is to be preferred to *fama* (or even *fata*) because it makes the best sense on two grounds and is not implausible on the third: the reading *seu magnae data Fata neci* takes into account not only the authority of *fata* in the ms. tradition and the suitability of *Fata* in the epic context but also the grammatical plausibility of the clause. However, Kohlmann (1884), Klotz (1908), Williams (1972) and Hill (1983) prefer *fama*, which appears only late in the ms. tradition (Dovoriensis, codex Cantabrigiensis, 10th century). Although the clause *magnae data fama neci* ('the fame accorded a great death') makes good linguistic sense and does not reiterate *entirely* the thought expressed of *praeceps gloria* ('blind glory', 834) in the preceding clause (cf. Williams [1972: *ad Theb.* 10.835]; *contra* Mozley [1928b: 380 n. a]), the latter expression does express a similar sentiment as the former, perhaps, but not necessarily, excluding the aspect of dying (cf. Williams [1972: *ad Theb.* 10.835]). Most surviving mss., following what is regarded as the least corrupt ms. of the *Thebaid* (Puteanus, codex Parisianus 8051, 9th century), read *fata*, which Müller (1870), Garrod (1906a), Mozley (1928b), Klinnert (1973), and Traglia and Aricò (1980) faithfully retain. Klotz's (1908) suggestion of *magnae data fata necis* ('the fate allotted of a great death'), while plausible, carries no weight in the ms. tradition and is unnecessary.

The phrase *magnae data fata neci* ('the Fates assigned a great death', 835) expresses the important idea in the *Thebaid* of the supernaturally contrived destruction of mankind; this idea complements the themes in the next one and one-half lines of the precariousness and transience of human welfare (*laeta malorum principia*, 'disaster's propitious seeds', 835f.) and of divine hostility toward mankind (*blandae superum mortalibus irae*, 'the god's anger alluring to mortals', 836). On the necessity of *Fata* for *fata* in the epic context, see above, n. 62.

The clause *magnae data Fata neci* (835) seems initially an odd expression and awkward construction, perhaps even poor grammar (cf. Mozley [1928b: 380 n. a] and Williams [1972: *ad Theb.* 10.835]), whose rough sense (reading *data* as a passive) suggests a rendering such as, 'the Fates were given to (grant him, i.e., Capaneus) a glorious death'. But this is not a case simply of standing the passive verb on its head and being made to yield the meaning. In a context where the Fates (as subject) can be viewed as acting in their own interest rather than as merely acting upon themselves, the attraction of the verb into the passive form as an indirect middle (in imitation of the Greek middle) would not be so surprising. The use of a verb in this way is not unparalleled. The passive voice may have developed out of the middle (rather than the other way around), and a large number of Latin verbs was recognised as having both active and passive forms without any appreciable difference in signification or syntactic function (e.g., *minito, minitor*, 'I threaten'; *reuerto, reuertor*, 'I turn back'); in addition, there was a host of other verbs where the passive eventually assumed the function of the middle (e.g., *loricam induitur*, 'he slips on his breastplate', *Aen.* 7.640); cf. Hofmann and Szantyr (1965: 287–91 §162). Modern linguists sometimes forget that the passive voice was more of a morphological phenomenon than a functional one, since its form assumed many non-passive uses, of which the middle was only one. There are notable examples of the passive in postclassical literature where the subject can be seen to acting in its own interest (e.g., *frontem ac tergum uallo munitus*,

Whether that madness
Was sent from deep night, and the Stygian sisters,
Pursuing the standard of Capaneus, drove him against Jove,
Or whether Virtue passed her bounds, or blind glory,
Or the Fates assigned a great death, or of disaster's
Propitious seeds and the gods' anger alluring to mortals.

Significantly the infection of Capaneus with *furor* ('madness') by the infernal deities is mentioned first as a possible reason for his assault upon the Olympian ruler (831–33). Three of the other possible causes of Capaneus' action that are mentioned—Virtus ('Virtue') overstepping her bounds (834; cf. 845f.), the death appointed by the Fates (835), and divine hostility (836)—enhance the sub-theme of supernatural cruelty and injustice through their allusions to the violent destruction of man, while another cause—the vagaries of human fortune (835f.)—enhances the sub-theme of human limitation and suffering.[64]

Even though his defiant challenge of Jupiter is motivated by the infernal deities, Capaneus is rewarded by Pluto's infernal colleagues as if he were entirely responsible for the deed (cf. 11.69–71). This is entirely consistent with the notion of human accountability presented in the poem—individuals are held accountable for their actions regardless of the degree of divine involvement—but there is a notable difference in his case. Eteocles, Polynices, Tydeus and Creon endure harsh retribution for offences that are committed under the influence of Pluto and the Furies, but Capaneus is favourably treated by the underworld deities since his aggressive behaviour is directed against Jupiter, for whom Pluto feels utter contempt (cf. 8.34ff.).

The pernicious rôle of the Furies is not limited merely to the major scenes that have been examined thus far; they are directly or indirectly responsible for much of the action that takes place on and off the battlefield. The Furies are frequently portrayed inspiring the warriors on both sides to martial violence and ensuring their deaths in battle (e.g., 7.562ff., esp. 562f., 579ff. [Erinys]; 8.344–47 [Tisiphone]; cf. 3.630f. [Furies]; 7.466f. [Tisiphone]). Mors ('Death'), who dwells with the Furies in the underworld (cf. 376f.), selects as victims those in

'having fortified his front and rear with earthworks', Tac. *Ann.* 1.50). I suggest that *data* functions in *Theb.* 10.835 as a *weak* indirect middle, that is, with the passive form retaining some trace of its original middle meaning. Taking *data* (sc. *sunt*) in this way and *magnae neci* as a dative of the 'end aimed at', a concise translation of the entire clause (*magnae data Fata neci*) reads, 'the Fates assigned a great death'.

[64] The references to the inordinate valour of Capaneus and his love of glory (*Theb.* 10.834) stress his high-spirited qualities.

the prime of life, while the infernal goddesses usurp control of their destinies (*Furiae rapuerunt licia Parcis*, 'the Furies have seized the threads from the Fates', 8.382). Certainly the irrational and inhuman behaviour of the Seven on the battlefield is attributable in the main to the pernicious influence of the Furies. On the surface the actions of these heroes undermine the traditional heroic concept of valour in battle, since they take a perverse delight in butchering even the weak and helpless warriors they meet.[65] But the brutal behaviour of the Seven is merely another illustration of overwhelming supernatural control over mankind and is therefore more a condemnation of the malevolent gods who drive men (and women) to destruction than it is a criticism of those human figures who, despite their *physical* strength, are helpless before the influence of the Furies and are unable to withstand the psychological onslaught of these powers. The influence of the Furies is not limited to events in the main narrative; their lurking presence is felt in the Coroebus episode when they permit the horrid paedophagous monster of Apollo to be conceived in their bedchamber (1.597–99) and in the Hypsipyle episode when they ascend from the underworld to witness the Lemnian women's hideous murder of Charops' son and unnatural pledge to murder their husbands (5.156f.). Brief references in the narrative to past deeds further point up their cruel and vindictive natures (e.g., 1.476f.; 3.641; 4.643).

The Furies are shown exerting their sway over other prominent human figures in the poem. Oedipus is already under their control when he utters his curse against his sons (1.51f.; 11.617–19).[66] The opening of his curse shows that the Furies have exerted a pervasive influence over his actions from the moment of his birth (1.60–72). His patricide (1.64–66; cf. 1.73f.; 2.7–10; 11.491) and incest (1.68–70; 11.491f.) are two of his more notable crimes that are portrayed as being inspired directly by the Furies. The Furies continue to influence the behaviour of Oedipus (e.g., 7.466–69, esp. 468) until they release him from their control after the fratricide (cf. 11.599ff., esp. 617–21), whereupon he initially accepts responsibility for the deaths of

[65] Cf. Holland (1976: 169).

[66] Ahl (1986: 2902) and Whitman (1987: 55) appear not to realise the significance of Oedipus' being under the influence of the Furies when he utters his curse (cf. *Theb.* 1.51f.), although Whitman is *technically* correct when he asserts that 'the *Thebaid* ushers in the Fury of war at the summons of a man'. Vessey (1971b: 92; 1973: 280; cf. 1992: xxxvii) suggests wrongly that Oedipus comes under the influence of Tisiphone only after he summons the Fury and (therefore) Oedipus' attribution of blame to her (11.619) is only partly justified.

his sons and displays a deep sense of guilt and remorse for fomenting hatred between them and indirectly causing their deaths (605ff.). The previously obdurate Oedipus can scarcely believe that he has been reduced to tears and is amazed at his feelings of love, forgiveness and repentance:

> 'Tarda meam, Pietas, longo post tempore mentem
> Percutis? estne sub hoc hominis Clementia corde?
> Vincis io miserum, uincis, Natura, parentem!
> En habeo gemitus lacrimaeque per arida serpunt
> Vulnera et in molles sequitur manus impia planctus.'
> (*Theb.* 11.605–09)
> 'Late after so long a time do you strike my heart,
> Piety? Does Clemency reside in this human breast?
> Ah, you conquer, Nature, you conquer this wretched father!
> See, I mourn, and tears stream over my dry wounds,
> And this stained hand follows with womanish beating of my breast.'

Left alone by the malevolent deities, Oedipus is responsive to the benevolent goddesses and becomes human again.

Oedipus then shifts the blame from himself to a host of human and divine characters. He condemns one of the gods for granting his execrable prayer against Polynices and Eteocles (11.617–19; cf. 1.56–87); in addition, he holds Erinys, his mother, father, former kingdom and even his excised eyes responsible for his nefarious curse and prayer (11.619f.). Oedipus is aware that the sins of his forebears have been transmitted to him by his parents and that the deaths of his sons are a natural consequence of the guilt that he inherited from previous generations. Oedipus' fate and that of his sons are not entirely of his own making, for Jupiter merely brings to fruition through the agency of other supernatural powers what he has ordained. There is considerable justification for Oedipus' attribution of blame to the Furies, since they are shown not only inspiring (cf. 1.73f.) and immediately carrying his curse into effect (88ff.) but also exerting a continuing and decisive influence over his actions (see esp. 1.60–72; 7.466–69); more generally, these demonic creatures are shown to be instrumental in bringing the plans of Jupiter and Pluto (see esp. 1.214–17 and 8.34–79, respectively) to fruition through their infection of various human figures with *furor*, notably Laius (cf. 2.7–10, esp. 10), Oedipus and his sons (e.g., 7.466–69). Oedipus' attempt to absolve himself of blame for his sons' deaths on account of divine causation is reasonable enough, given that he is shown to be inextricably entangled in the

web of a divine plan. At first glance it appears that the tenability of his argument is undermined to some extent because of his apparent incitement of Tisiphone and other infernal deities to vengeance on his behalf, but at the moment he utters his curse against his sons he is shown to be under their power; furthermore, he is exculpable to the degree that he is caught up in events beyond his control and is unable to exert any real influence over the fates of his sons.

In response to the curse of Oedipus the Furies set upon Eteocles and Polynices and infect them with jealousy and hatred of each other and an insatiable desire for power, even inspiring the brothers' fated pact of alternate rule (1.123–43; 7.467; cf. 7.468, where Tisiphone incites the brothers against Oedipus). On one occasion Tisiphone saves Polynices from death after he falls from his chariot (6.504ff.); on another the goddess turns aside a spear hurled by Tydeus at Eteocles that then strikes down Phlegyas (8.682–88), who becomes a victim of the careless unconcern of the gods. Her actions, which are intended to save the brothers for the fratricide ordained by Pluto, result in much needless death and suffering on both sides of the war. The narrative reveals that without the direct intervention of Tisiphone in saving Polynices hostilities could have been prevented (cf. 6.513f.); without her interference in the brief confrontation between Tydeus and Eteocles, the monarch would have been slain and there would have been no reason for the war to continue (cf. 8.684–88). In some situations the lurking presence of Tisiphone is apparent, as when Harmonia's necklace enters Eriphyle's chamber (4.211–13), thereby ensuring Amphiaraus' death (cf. 193f.).

The various interventions of Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* reveal that she is not to be viewed as Oedipus' 'twin',[67] 'a personification of Oedipus' diseased mind',[68] 'an objectified embodiment of Oedipus' spiritual state',[69] or as 'simply . . . "vendetta" personified'.[70] Rather, Statius is intent upon stressing the physicality of Tisiphone:

> Centum illi stantes umbrabant ora cerastae,
> Turba minor diri capitis; sedet intus abactis
> Ferrea lux oculis, qualis per nubila Phoebes
> Atracia rubet arte labor; suffusa ueneno
> Tenditur ac sanie gliscit cutis; igneus atro

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[67] Vessey (1992: xxi).
[68] Vessey (1971a: 378).
[69] Vessey (1973: 75).
[70] Ahl (1986: 2840).

Ore uapor, quo longa sitis morbique famesque
Et populis mors una uenit; riget horrida tergo
Palla, et caerulei redeunt in pectora nodi:
Atropos hos atque ipsa nouat Proserpina cultus.
Tum geminas quatit ira manus: haec igne rogali
Fulgurat, haec uiuo manus aera uerberat hydro.
(*Theb.* 1.103–13)

Shading her face were a hundred horned snakes standing erect,
The lesser crowd on her frightful head. An iron light sits
Within her sunken eyes, as when an Atracian spell reddens Phoebe
Through the clouds. Suffused with venom, her skin is stretched
And swells with ulceration. From her black mouth breathes
A fiery vapour, whence comes lasting thirst, sickness and famine
And the widespread death of people. From her shoulders hang stiff
A shaggy cloak, whose dark blue knots converge at her breast.
Atropos and Proserpina herself repair this garment.
Then she shakes both hands in anger: this one glows with
A funeral torch; the other beats the air with a live snake.

Elsewhere Tisiphone is seen conversing with her sister Megaera just prior to their incitement of the brothers to mutual fratricide (11.57–112). Certainly it is not true to say that 'Oedipus has brought her into existence and, indeed, Tisiphone is *nothing other* than a reflection of him' (my emphasis).[71] The text shows conclusively that the Furies, namely the mastermind Tisiphone, exert control over Oedipus for almost the entire length of the epic (1.49–11.580; cf. 11.619) until he has served their purpose.

Rôle of the Goddesses: Olympian and Non-Olympian

From the conduct of the malevolent Furies it can be surmised that female deities in the epic exhibit a destructive propensity no less than their male counterparts. While their conduct and that of a powerful goddess like Bellona (a sign of her physical strength is her javelin throw of eighty Roman miles from Argos to Thebes, 4.5–8), female counterpart of Mars (cf. 5.155; 7.73; 11.84) who inspires the Argives (4.9–12; 8.655f.) and Thebans (8.348–52) to a frenzied desire for war, should scarcely surprise, it is significant that goddesses such as Juno and Venus are directly responsible for the most senseless and violent incidents in the *Thebaid*.

[71] Vessey (1973: 75).

One of the most mindless and bloodstained episodes in the poem is instigated by Juno when she has Somnus bring sleep upon the Thebans surrounding the Argive camp with the result that the Argives are able to slaughter their foe with ease (10.126ff.; cf. 79–82). The main reasons given for her conduct are anger and jealousy against Jupiter for his adultery and against Alcmene for her two children fathered by him (75–78). The ensuing nocturnal massacre is depicted in the most graphic terms of unrestrained butchery and horror (271–325), which surpass those of the Doloneia on which it is modelled in *Iliad* 10 (482–508).[72] While Athene assumes the motivating (10.482f.) and guiding rôles (509–11) in the nocturnal slaughter of the Trojans in the *Iliad*, Statius places Juno at the forefront of the action in *Thebaid* 10, clearing a path for the Argives through the Theban camp, illuminating the Theban bodies with her torch, and infusing courage into the attackers (282–84). The ruthlessness of the gods could not be more apparent than in a scene where the petty jealousy of Juno occasions the slaughter of helpless human victims.

In three similar scenes once again attesting to the vagaries and arbitrariness of divine support for human causes, Juno leads the Argive women along concealed paths to their husbands' corpses (12.134–36), assists Argia in locating the body of her husband Polynices (299–313), and steals away from Jupiter's bed (291–94) to assist the Argive women in their supplication of the Athenian populace (464–80, esp. 464–70, 474–76). Although these actions conform to her traditional rôle as the goddess of marriage, Juno assists the women mainly because Argia is her favourite votaress (cf. 302f.) and Argos her favourite city (cf. 1.259, 279f., 286). Moreover, given her wounded feelings and the anger she harbours against Jupiter for involving Argos in his plan to topple Thebes (1.249f.; cf. 250–82), a desire for vengeance against him would be in character.

The Fata ('Fates'), or Parcae, referred to as *inmites* ('harsh') by Apollo (7.774), are seen in the company of various infernal deities (e.g., 8.20–31) and are mentioned along with them (e.g., 1.88–113, 326–28, esp. 111, 328). They frequently intervene in human affairs with disastrous consequences (cf. 3.179f.). These goddesses render Eteocles incapable of heeding the warning of Maeon on the ill fate of the party sent to assassinate Tydeus on his return to Thebes (2.694f.), which results in the ignominious survival of the augur (cf. 3.40–42, 67–69) and

[72] Cf. Juhnke (1972: 144–47).

the deaths of his forty-nine companions (cf. 3.59–77, esp. 59–63, 75–77); they overwhelm the attempts of Adrastus and Amphiaraus to avert war (cf. 4.3f.); they weaken the resolve of Amphiaraus, who is against the war (cf. 3.620–47), by making a violent attack upon his will (4.187–95 [Atropos]); they ensure the failure of the noble Hopleus and Dymas' attempted rescue of Tydeus' corpse out of envy for the pair's devotion (cf. 10.384f.); and they impel Creon against his will to believe the word of Menoeceus—whom Virtus ('Virtue') has deceived through her promise that his suicide will save Thebes (662ff.)—that he is returning to the city to seek aid for a wounded comrade (727–37).

The Fates' deterministic counterpart, Fortuna ('Fortune'), takes pleasure in thwarting *spes inmodicas* ('unreasonable hopes', 6.691f.) and reveals a capricious and harmful nature (cf. 6.936f.; 8.456ff.). She is no mere Hellenistic Tyche. Disapproving of the fratricide, the goddess delays it (11.447ff.), just as she delays interfering in the chariot race during the funeral games (6.474f.); but after an impressive practice-throw by Phlegyas with the discus (678–84), she does intervene, spoiling his competitive attempt (691–96). Elsewhere Fortuna is described as rejoicing in frustrating the hopes of Eteocles and Polynices (11.648), transferring *maligna manu* ('with a spiteful hand', 649f.) the sceptre of power to Creon (649–51), mocking the relatives of war's victims (12.35), and withdrawing from the shrine of justice (505). She is also mentioned as a possible cause of Tydeus' massacre of the Theban band of warriors sent to ambush him (3.60–62, esp. 61) and of the cataclysmic merging of Eteocles' ashes and Polynices' corpse (12.420–23, esp. 422). Statius' apostrophe of the goddess as *melior Fortuna* ('gracious Fortune', 11.659) seems ironic.

Minerva is depicted as the rival of Mars (cf. 2.718f.; 7.33; 9.87f.) and Bellona (cf. 2.718f.) in destructive power and is represented generally as a terrifying war-goddess (e.g., 2.704f., 710–13, 715f.), most notably when she assists Theseus in his destructive venture against Thebes by striking fear into the Theban populace with her aegis (12.606–10; cf. 2.716f.). This is no personified deity of human wisdom.[73] The influence of Minerva and the whimsicality of her patronage is apparent in the confrontation between Tydeus and Haemon when

[73] *Contra* Feeney (1991: 365), who interprets *Theb.* 2.684–90 as revealing of personified wisdom, a passage that appears just before the references pointing to Minerva's rôle as a fearsome war-goddess (2.704f., 710–13, 715, 718f.)!

she first drives the Calydonian hero against his weaker foe (8.499f.), then decides to spare the Theban for no other reason than to please Hercules (527f.).

The vagaries of divine support become evident from a comparison between the fates of Hercules and Tydeus, favourites of Minerva. That Tydeus possesses the same heroic and athletic qualities as Hercules is evident in the former's martial and athletic deeds. His monomachy in *Thebaid* 2.527ff. and *aristeia* in 8.465ff. are the most obvious illustrations of his heroic prowess, but his defeat of Agylleus in the wrestling event bears particular significance because of the comparison between him and Hercules. In the wrestling contest Tydeus raises Agylleus' colossal frame on to his shoulders (6.890–93), a feat similar to the one that Hercules performs in his defeat of Antaeus (893–96). The contrast between the behaviour and destinies of Hercules and Tydeus emerges in Tydeus' clash with Haemon (499f.). Minerva assists Tydeus in his exploits (8.459), while Hercules champions Haemon (497–99). Minerva's and Hercules' support for their favourites results in a confrontation between the two divinities on the field of battle (500f.). Hercules' deferential laudation of Minerva (502–16) and subsequent withdrawal from the battle out of gratitude and respect for her assumes an increasing significance when contrasted with Tydeus' vainglorious boast (6.906–08) and especially his divinely incited anthropophagy (8.751ff.). Hercules is portrayed by Statius as a dutiful worshipper of Minerva; his reward is apotheosis.

Tydeus is shown as a powerful figure whose outstanding qualities are offset by his impetuosity and lack of restraint. Nevertheless the vagaries of divine support are apparent when he is driven mad by Tisiphone (8.757f.; cf. 11.85–88) at the behest of Pluto (8.71f.) and is constrained to besmear himself with the brains and blood of Melanippus' corpse (8.760f.; cf. 757); hence Minerva's subsequent abandonment of Tydeus (764–66), whom the goddess had intended to raise to heaven as she did Hercules (759f.; cf. 514f.), can be attributed to the harmful intervention of the Fury. Tydeus is made to suffer for a supernaturally motivated crime that is actually the responsibility of Tisiphone and Pluto. After initially blaming himself for Tydeus' death (9.60), Polynices attributes it to divine causation, declaring that Jupiter and Mars are responsible for his fate:

'(num fallor?) et ipse
Inuidit pater et tota Mars impulit hasta.'
(*Theb.* 9.71f.)

'The father himself (surely I am not wrong?)
Envied you, and Mars struck you down with his spear's full force.'

Polynices is cognizant that ultimately Tydeus is the victim of the supreme ruler's hostility toward man through the agency of Mars, who is frequently shown inflaming the Argives against their Theban foes (e.g., 3.260ff., 420ff.; 7.64ff.).

Occasionally a figure such as Hercules reaps unforeseen benefits from goddesses. When Tydeus overwhelms Haemon (8.522ff.), Minerva intervenes to save him (527ff.); however, she does not do so because of any dutiful or even destructive act on his part, for earlier the Theban had zealously slain a multitude of opposing warriors including the Olenian Butes, *puer malasque comamque / integer* ('a boy with smooth cheeks and uncut hair', 486f.). Minerva rewards Hercules' devotion by sparing the life of Haemon (528). Thus the goddess is able to look after the interests of one of her favourites, although in the immediate circumstances they clash with her destructive intentions and those of another favourite (cf. 499f.)

Even the goddess Virtus[74] ('Virtue') reveals a propensity toward violence and destruction. In fact she functions in the *Thebaid* as a goddess of martial inspiration rather than of virtue. As Virtus approaches Thebes at the beginning of the Menoeceus episode, her feet are astride the earth while her face is not far from the sky (10.638); this delineation recalls the similar descriptions of Eris ('Strife') in *Il.* 4.442f. (cf. 439–56, esp. 440–45) and Fama ('Rumour') in *Aen.* 4.176f. (cf. 173–197, esp. 173–88),[75] thereby suggesting an association between Virtus and these goddesses. The dire significance of this connexion is strengthened in the ensuing description of Virtus' personal attributes: her (usual) appearance is austere and awesome (cf. 10.641f.), her face stern (644–46), and she uses deceit to achieve her ends by adopting the appearance of Manto to make herself appear credible to Menoeceus (cf. 639–41). In the *Thebaid* Virtus is associated with a number of deities whose qualities are hardly admirable. The goddess accompanies Bacchus along with Ira ('Anger', 4.661), Furor ('Madness', 661; cf. 5.74, where Furor is allied with the bloodthirsty Venus), Metus ('Fear', 662) and Ardor ('Passion', 662) as he returns from subjugating Haemus (4.652ff.); forms part of Mars' court in Haemus (7.47ff.) again with Furor (52) and Metus (49) and also Impetus ('Attack', 47), Nefas ('Sin',

[74] On Roman Virtus see Eisenhut (1973: esp. 163–72 [Statius]).
[75] Cf. Axtell (1907: 25), Mozley (1928b: 366 n. b) and Feeney (1991: 383).

48), Irae ('Anguish', 48), Discordia ('Discord', 50; cf. 5.74, where Discordia is associated with Venus), Minae ('Threats', 51) and Mors ('Death', 53); has her place usurped along with Bellona, Mars and Minerva by the Furies prior to the dual fratricide (11.412–15); and is described as the neighbour of Mors (7.702) and close companion of Jupiter (10.632).

But Virtus' supreme moment occurs when she inspires the suicidal plunge of Menoeceus into the enemy ranks (10.756ff.; cf. 628–30, 657, 661–71, 678–81, esp. 672–77). Menoeceus clearly does not 'by his own free choice . . . acquiesce in the divine will';[76] rather, he has no such free will to act as he wishes, since he displays an initial reluctance to follow Virtus' instructions (672) and does so only after she physically touches and instils into him a love of death (671, 672–77). Eurydice blames the gods for her son's unjust death (795) and perceives that the demands of the snake of Mars for an offering to ensure a Theban victory inspired him to embrace death willingly (806–10; cf. 612f.).[77] Her assertion that her son's death is in violation of the will of the Fates (809f.) seems to be a perceptive insight into the machinations of supernatural forces, since Menoeceus' death is but one incident in the destructive plan of Jupiter and has nothing to do with the Fates. The youth's death accords with the will of the supreme ruler, who just prior to the intervention of Virtus is shown in close companionship with the goddess (632f.); thus the action of Virtus—despite the uncertainty about whether it is independent of or prompted directly by Jupiter (634f.)—in hastening the demise of Menoeceus is best construed within the broader context of Jupiter's overriding control over events on earth. Notwithstanding the supernatural imposition of death upon the youth (cf. 665–68) and the understandable concern of his mother over his ultimate fate (808f.), his death is still portrayed in heroic terms as a patriotic *Opfertod* worthy of his elevation to sacred status (cf. 781f.). Not long after this event, Capaneus asserts that Virtus has ordered him to attack Thebes at the place where Menoeceus fell (845f.), an assault that leads directly to his own death at the hands of Jupiter (921–38).

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[76] Vessey (1973: 120).

[77] The snake of Mars is the serpent slain by Cadmus; upon instructions from Minerva he sowed its teeth and armed men sprang up from the furrows (cf. *Theb.* 10.663); they proceeded to kill each other until just five warriors were left, whom Cadmus persuaded to help build Thebes (Hyg. *Fab.* 178; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.1f.; Ov. *Met.* 3.26–130).

Sometimes the methods of the goddesses are merely indirect, as in the Opheltes episode when Fama ('Rumour') nearly causes the lynching of the innocent Lycurgus after she spreads false rumours about the fate of the former Lemnian queen (5.691ff.), or when, urged on by Bellona and Mars, she helps to fan the flames of war by spreading rumours about its inevitability (3.425–31). Not *all* the goddesses in the poem, however, exhibit cruel and unjust behaviour. The major exceptions are Pietas ('Piety'), who is depicted as being offended by the behaviour of the other deities and lives apart from them in a remote region of the heavens (11.457ff.), and the incorporeal Clementia ('Clemency'; cf. 12.493f.), who is described as no typical god of power and as a gentle deity (481ff.).

Goddesses of Destruction: Venus and the Furies

In *Thebaid* 5 Hypsipyle recounts the story of the Lemnian massacre to Adrastus and the Argive warriors (49–498). This metadiegetic narrative, or narrative within a narrative (what the Germans call *Rahmenerzählung*), arguably features the most gruesome example of Olympian intervention in the poem. Venus is angered by the failure of the Lemnian women to pay proper homage to her and resolves to exact vengeance for their neglect (58ff.). She destroys hymeneal love (64–74), infects the men with martial zeal so that they attack and destroy the innocent inhabitants of Thrace (73–84, esp. 75–80; cf. 53f., 170–76), instigates the women's human sacrifice (157–65) and massacre of their husbands with the assistance of the Furies (190–240; cf. 85–169), and along with Amor ('Love') and Juno induces the women to fall in love with the Argonauts to their later detriment (445ff.; cf. 471–85). Since the severe penalty Venus imposes upon the women seems entirely out of proportion to the magnitude of their offence and causes the death of countless innocent victims, the horrific and pathetic description of the Lemnian massacre (195–261) bears testimony to her malevolence and injustice.

Intricate and complex, the structure of the Hypsipyle episode (49–498) is recessed panel (ABCDEFGFEDCBA). The content of the entire episode is carefully arranged for maximum effect around the *pietas* of Hypsipyle; her heroic action of rescuing her father from the frenzied Lemnian women is the focus of the framed narrative and occupies the central panel:

(A) Harmony in Lemnos (49–56)
- a prosperous island prior to arrival of Venus

(B) Marital disharmony in Lemnos (57–74)

(C) Men depart from Lemnos for Thrace (75–84)
- unhappiness of Lemnian women

(D) Venus, Furies instil hatred into women (85–169)

(E) Men return to Lemnos (170–94)

(F) Venus, Furies infect women with *furor* (195–240)
- incitation of women to madness
- women in jubilant mood murder husbands

(G) *Pietas* of Hypsipyle (240–95)
- saves her father Thoas

(F) Venus, Furies release women from grip of *furor* (296–304)
- restoration of women's sanity
- women remorseful, perplexed after the slaughter

(E) Argonauts arrive at Lemnos (335–444)

(D) Venus, Amor instil love into women (445–67)

(C) Argonauts depart from Lemnos (468–85)

(B) Civil disharmony in Lemnos (486–92)

(A) Harmony restored in Lemnos (?)
- departure of Hypsipyle from the island (493–98)

This concentric structure illustrates the vicissitudes of fortune experienced by the Lemnians for their failure to worship Venus. The fluctuating fortunes of the Lemnian women are reminiscent of the changing fortunes of the Argives in the Coroebus story and resemble the frequent change in circumstances of the Argives and Thebans in the main narrative.

While the incidents that Aeneas relates in the *Aeneid*—or, for that matter, those recounted by Odysseus in the *Odyssey*—are recognised as possessing an obvious relationship to scenes and events occurring elsewhere in the work and are therefore given a heightened effectiveness, the tale of Hypsipyle has frequently been dismissed by critics as a frivolous digression devoid of significance or relevance to the rest of the *Thebaid*.[78] This is probably because Hypsipyle expatiates on a sequence of events that bears little or no relation to the central plot; in addition, the incidents narrated by her fall well outside the

[78] Helm (1892: 172), Eissfeldt (1904: 423), Daniels (1905: 12), Legras (1905: 152, 277), Butler (1909: 211f.), Dimsdale (1915: 460), Summers (1920: 31), Moore (1921: 171), Duff (1927: 383), Maher (1950: 119), Aricò (1960: 277), Mendell (1967: 124f.), Williams (1978: 198) and Ogilvie (1980: 233).

chronological sequence of events. On the surface, this gives the appearance that the interpolated tale is included merely to afford variety and to embellish the main narrative. However, as some recent critics have demonstrated, the tale of Hypsipyle is no mere digression or embellishment, despite its lack of relevance to the plan of action in the rest of the epic.[79] Furthermore, even though an examination of the fragments of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* reveals that the Hypsipyle story assumes an important rôle in the poetic tradition concerning the Seven,[80] it is equally wrong to suggest that this tale is included in the *Thebaid* merely for this reason. The significance of the metadiegetic narrative of Hypsipyle is in its close thematic connexion to other sections in the *Thebaid*, a relationship perhaps best described as organic. Essential to the meaning of the epic, the episode connects with other sections through the paralleling of episodes, foreshadowing of events, evocation of reminiscences and repetition of motifs in the main narrative. The real importance of this mini-epic, or epic within an epic, as it may be described aptly, lies in its ability to underscore and elaborate upon the central issues of the epic concerning supernatural malevolence and human suffering, even though it introduces a scene that does not properly belong in the main narrative.

At the end of *Thebaid* 4 the Argives, parched with thirst, come upon Hypsipyle, who saves them from an ignominious end by leading them to water (746ff.). After the troops quench their thirst and proceed to reform their ranks, Adrastus entreats Hypsipyle to reveal her identity (5.20–27) and relate her tale of misfortune (43–47). With a sometimes curt, uneven style of expression betraying her excitement, she proceeds to tell how Lemnos was wealthy and prosperous, but the anger of Venus caused by the failure of the citizens to worship the goddess precipitated a chain of events that destroyed the well-being of the city (54–60).[81]

In revenge for this neglect Venus, assisted by the Furies and the presence of Odia ('Hatred'), Furor ('Madness') and Discordia ('Discord'), destroys hymeneal love:

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[79] Cf. Krumbholz (1955: 125ff.), Gossage (1959: 4; 1972: 199f.), Schetter (1960: 5f., 89ff.), Venini (1961: 68f.), Mackay (1965: 296), Ahl (1966: 136; 1982: 933), Watkiss (1966: 173), Götting (1969), Vessey (1970a: 44), Holland (1976: 80f.) and Burgess (1978: 231).

[80] For the fragments see the edition of Bond (1963).

[81] Vessey (1970a: 45) suggests that the Lemnian women fall into sin when they accept Polyxo's advice to slay their husbands, whereas their fault lies primarily in neglecting to worship Venus in the first instance.

'certe erant media quae noctis in umbra
Diuam alios ignes maioraque tela gerentem
Tartareas inter thalamis uolitasse sorores
Vulgarent, utque implicitis arcana domorum
Anguibus et saeua formidine nupta replesset
Limina nec fidi populum miserata mariti.
Protinus a Lemno teneri fugistis Amores:
Mutus Hymen uersaeque faces et frigida iusti
Cura tori. nullae redeunt in gaudia noctes,
Nullus in amplexu sopor est, Odia aspera ubique
Et Furor et medio recubat Discordia lecto.'

(*Theb.* 5.64–74; cf. 77–80)

'Some swore that in the dead of night the goddess,
Bearing other torches and more deadly weapons, flew about
The marriage chambers with the Tartarean sisters,
And filled our secret rooms with writhing serpents and our
Bridal thresholds with monstrous terror, having no pity
For the people of her faithful husband. Tender Loves,
You fled at once from Lemnos. Hymen was mute; the torches
Were turned over; and cold neglect fell upon the lawful bed.
There was no return to nights of joy; nor was sleep taken
In mutual embrace. Everywhere bitter Hatred,
And both Madness and Discord reclined in mid-couch.'

As with the scheme of Jupiter in the main narrative, the plan of Venus to exact retribution sets family members against one another and involves the guiltless in its fulfilment. Although the Lemnian women are more guilty than the majority of Argives and Thebans, since as a group they are responsible for incurring the goddess' wrath through their neglect, the punishment of the Lemnians far surpasses by any determination the magnitude of their offence.

Consequently the Lemnian husbands are infected with martial zeal and leave their tearful wives in order to attack Thrace (73–84; cf. 53f.), an act that parallels the fateful decision of the Argives to attack Thebes in the main narrative.[82] The devastation of Thrace, whose inhabitants are the guiltless victims of Venus' plan to punish the Lemnian women for their impiety, corresponds to the destruction of Argos in the main narrative, since Venus' choice of Thrace as an opponent of Lemnos is no less arbitrary than the selection of Argos as an enemy of Thebes by Jupiter. As the husbands return victorious from Thrace, still out of sight of Lemnos, Venus exerts her demonic influence over Polyxo, who attempts to persuade the women to kill

[82] Cf. Vessey (1970a: 45).

their husbands (90ff.).[83] The old woman claims that the gods sanction the deed and makes an appeal to the other women based on the unfairness of their plight and the suffering they have endured (104–22); the references to the desertion of the women by their husbands (106–08; 112–17) at the instigation of Venus arouses sympathy for their plight.

Just as Polyxo attempts to incite the women to violence by promising to sacrifice her own children, the Lemnian fleet is seen approaching Lemnos. Polyxo exhorts the women once again, claiming that the gods are leading the men to Lemnos to meet their deserved fates (132–42). Driven to a paroxysm of fury, the women sacrifice an innocent babe while taking a pledge to slay their husbands (143–69). The infernal deities bear witness to this gruesome slaying and unnatural pledge:

> 'Hic sanxere fidem, tu Martia testis Enyo
> Atque inferna Ceres, Stygiaeque Acheronte recluso
> Ante preces uenere deae; sed fallit ubique
> Mixta Venus, Venus arma tenet, Venus admouet iras.'
> (*Theb.* 5.155–58)
> 'Here they pledged faith, and you were witness, Martian Enyo, and you,
> Infernal Ceres; and the Stygian goddesses, revealing
> Acheron, arrived before their prayers; but Venus unseen
> In their midst was everywhere, Venus bearing arms, fuelling rage.'

The maddening of Polyxo is the first step in Venus' scheme to punish the Lemnian women for their lack of religious piety,[84] just as the madness

[83] Schetter (1960: 55) asserts that the driving force behind the arousal of the Lemnian women by Polyxo to murder their husbands is nothing else but the fury caused by unfulfilled amorous desires. He suggests that the presence later of the Argonauts in Lemnos ameliorates the condition of the women, but that it is only a temporary relief since, like the Lemnian men, the Argonauts depart from the island; in this way Statius creates an erotic theme common to both episodes that gives an inner unity in contrast to the lack of connexion between the two scenes in the versions of Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus. However, there is a danger in carrying the sexual implications of the episodes too far. This is evident in some of the arguments of Vessey (1973: 179), who follows Schetter in maintaining that the cause of the women's madness is sexual. Vessey (1973: 181) posits neatly but unnecessarily that Hypsipyle remains unaffected by the sexual impulse that had incited Polyxo and the other women to madness because she is still a virgin; however, it is the psychological strength and moral superiority of Hypsipyle that prevents her from being infected with the madness that strikes the other women, not the fact that she is a virgin. Vessey's claim (1973: 181) that Venus is merely a personification of Polyxo's frustrated lusts is incompatible with the goddess' action of destroying sexual love between the Lemnian women and their husbands (*Theb.* 5.64–74).

[84] Cf. Delarue (1970: 444), who considers Polyxo to be a kind of *agent provocateur* in the service of Venus.

of Oedipus is utilised by Jupiter to put his plan into action of punishing the royal houses of Thebes and Argos (cf. 1.233–43).[85]

Upon their return to Lemnos the men disembark with considerable haste and eagerness and make the offerings promised to the gods for their safe return (5.170ff.). The manner of their arrival, the sacrifices they present to the gods, and the celebrations that follow are replete with tragic irony, since the husbands are ignorant of the fate that awaits them; their nescience parallels the tragic ignorance of Adrastus, who fatally misinterprets the significance of Tydeus and Polynices' arrival in Argos (cf. 1.493ff.).[86] Furthermore, the incongruity between the positive expectations of the Lemnians and the fell reality that awaits them parallels the discrepancy between the pleasant thoughts of the Argives about their impending arrival at Thebes (note especially the avian simile in 5.11–16) and the harsh circumstances that confront them once they reach the city. The thick, dark fog that descends upon Lemnos prior to the massacre of the husbands (183–85) parallels the pitchy darkness that conceals the earth just prior to the duel between Polynices and Eteocles (11.130–33); in both instances the obscuration adumbrates the perpetration of an offence that is morally corrupt. It is especially significant that supernatural powers are the driving force behind the crimes of the Lemnian women and the brothers; just as Venus and the Furies are responsible for inciting the women to commit their murderous deed (5.195–240; cf. 85–169), so Pluto and the Furies are the prime movers of the flagitious duel that takes place between Eteocles and Polynices (8.69–71; cf. 11.150–54, 197–204, 208f., 383–92, 403–06, 482–95).

The massacre scene related by Hypsipyle is horrific and pathetic (5.195ff.). Details of total desolation and bizarre morbidity predominate: eyes quiver and lips murmur of corpses newly slain and decapitated; blood and wine flow freely together; and the victims draw their final, torturous breaths (212–61). The massacre of the male population not only anticipates generally the horrible death and destruction that are to afflict the Argives and Thebans, but also specifically parallels the

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[85] Schetter (1960: 6ff.) comments on the similarity between Polyxo and Oedipus; cf. Vessey (1970a: 46; 1973: 175).

[86] Vessey (1973: 182) argues reasonably that the men's fleeting moment of happiness recalls the short period of happiness at Thebes (*Theb.* 2.71ff.); he less sensibly maintains (1973: 182) that the scene is analogous to the Argives' short rest in Nemea before their fateful war with Thebes, since the Argives merely satisfy a human need rather than attain happiness, however brief or illusory, when they quench their thirst.

murder of the sleeping Thebans in the main narrative (10.262–346). In the midst of this carnage Hypsipyle reveals the nobility and moral superiority of her character when she rescues her father Thoas with the assistance of Bacchus (5.240–51, 265ff.).[87] The god leads them to a ship just off shore where Thoas embarks (285–89). Her act of devotion stands in marked contrast to the treacherous behaviour of the other women, whose psychological submission to Venus and the Furies is a symbolic manifestation of man's proclivity to *furor* and violence under the influence of hostile supernatural forces. Her display of filial piety further contrasts with the impious behaviour of Eteocles and Polynices toward their father Oedipus in the main narrative.

Hypsipyle returns to Lemnos to find the women remorseful and distraught over the murder of their husbands, since the Furies and Venus have departed from the city (291–304); the infection of the women by the Furies and their release from their grip parallels the goddesses' control over and setting free of Oedipus in the main narrative. Hypsipyle is able to maintain the pretence of grief and mourning by building and setting fire to a pyre, casting her father's possessions upon it, and shedding tears from her fear of the ruse being discovered (313–19). The enormity of the women's criminal deeds and the seriousness of their subsequent plight is depicted in terms paralleling the consequences of the fratricide in the main narrative. There is a conspicuous absence of gain or benefit to the wives after they murder their husbands, while nothing positive emerges immediately from the deaths of Polynices and Eteocles. And just as the loss of their husbands leaves the Lemnian women destitute, powerless and open to invasion (5.305–12), so the deaths of the Argive heroes leave the survivors in Argos especially vulnerable to an Athenian attack (cf. 12.720–29).

The Lemnian women are subsequently visited by the Argonauts, who are able to land only after overcoming the feeble resistance of the women and surviving a severe storm sent by Jupiter (5.335ff.). Rain pours down from the heavens (362–64); darkness and gloom pervade the atmosphere (364–66); on all sides the violent winds assail the sea, which rises and falls tumultuously (366–70); and the ship is tossed about as it plunges to the depths of the ocean and is raised aloft in the air (370–72). The storm scene presents Statius with an

[87] The story of Thoas' escape from Lemnos inevitably recalls Aeneas' rescue of Anchises from the flames of Troy (*Aen.* 2.705ff.).

ideal opportunity to display his considerable powers of description. More importantly, the tempest is an illustration of the violent power of Jupiter and evokes reminiscence of the storm that assails Polynices and Tydeus on their way to Argos. In both cases the tempests serve as harbingers of tragic or disastrous events. Just as the storm that assails Polynices and Tydeus (1.342ff.; cf. 403ff.) forebodes human violence in the form of their confrontation (408ff.) and the outbreak of war (7.628ff.),[88] the storm scene in the Hypsipyle episode similarly portends the continuing misfortunes of the Lemnian women, who must endure their infection with love for the Argonauts by Venus; the departure of their new husbands from Lemnos for Colchis after only one year of marriage, a parting that the women oppose out of a supernaturally motivated love for their new husbands; and the voluntary exile of their queen.[89]

The Argonauts present an imposing sight as they disembark, and the Lemnian women are induced by Venus, Amor ('Love') and Juno to fall in love with the heroes (5.422ff.). After celebrating the arrival of the Argonauts, the women achieve a brief measure of happiness, eventually bearing children by their new husbands (445–62); however, Hypsipyle describes herself as the unwilling consort of Jason (453–57; cf. 403, esp 461–64) and bears him twin sons (463–65). The attempt of Venus to move the Lemnian women to fall in love with the Argonauts leaves Hypsipyle unaffected (454ff.), just as the earlier attempt of the goddess to incite the women to violence against their Lemnian husbands does not affect the pious queen (236ff.). Hypsipyle's refusal to submit to the erotic or baser passions and her pious devotion to her father demonstrates the nobility of her character and shows that she is morally superior to the other Lemnian women. The Argonauts resolve to leave Lemnos after staying only a year on the island (5.471ff.; cf. 459f.).[90]

[88] Cf. Holland (1976: 40).

[89] Vessey (1970a: 48; 1973: 177, 183) argues plausibly that the storm corresponds to the fury of the women; however, Vessey asserts that the storm ends when the *furor* of the women subsides (*Theb.* 5.397), whereas their *furor* abates and they become cognizant of their murderous deeds when the Furies and Venus depart from Lemnos in 5.302f. (cf. 303–34, esp. 303f., 326–29). In addition, Vessey's claim (1973: 185) that the storm and drought that assail the Argonauts and Argives in 5.361ff. and 4.699ff., respectively, are symbolic of the trials that must be experienced before the men are allowed to gain a respite from their travail is barely plausible.

[90] Vessey (1973: 184) attempts to force a connexion between the Argonauts' stay of one year on Lemnos (cf. *Theb.* 5.459ff.) and the Argives' brief sojourn in Nemea (encompassing the action occurring between 4.646 and 5.753); however, this is a dubious point, given the great difference in the length of their stays.

The Lemnian women's loss of their Argonautic husbands recalls the loss of their former spouses (478). After the Argonauts depart, the women gaze forlornly across an empty sea (481–85) just as they did when their former husbands left them (84).

Subsequently the women hear a rumour that Thoas has escaped from the island and reigns in Chios (486f.), whereupon Hypsipyle is compelled to flee in order to escape being punished for her devotion to her father (488–96, esp. 493f.). She is captured by pirates and brought to Achaea as a slave (497f.). Just as the action of Bacchus in conspiring with the semi-divine water nymphs to effect the drought that leads to much hardship for the Argives (4.684ff.) can be explained in terms of his resolve to safeguard Thebes, his favourite city (cf. 4.670–79; 7.155–92), so the assistance he provides Hypsipyle in the rescue of his son Thoas from Lemnos (5.265ff.) and the eventual restoration of Hypsipyle's twin sons to her (712ff.) suggest an inclination to look after his favourite humans. In the case of Hypsipyle the vagaries of divine support are especially evident, as Bacchus does not intervene in order to save the former queen from a band of pirates and slavery (496–98). Later Bacchus demonstrates a similar lack of concern for another of his favourites, the frail priest Eunaeus, whom he abandons callously after propelling him into the fray to meet a certain death at the hands of the gigantesque Capaneus (7.662ff; cf. 649–51). In fact these actions are consonant with the poet's general depiction of Bacchus as a cruel and destructive divinity (e.g., 1.11; 4.383–89; 7.211–14, 564–67; cf. 2.80ff.; 7.662).

As Hypsipyle relates her lengthy tale to the Argives, a further act of divine cruelty is perpetrated when the gods compel the exile to forget her charge Opheltes—

> Talia Lernaeis iterat dum regibus exul
> Lemnias et longa solatur damna querela
> Inmemor absentis *(sic di suasistis!)* alumni . . .
> (*Theb.* 5.499–501; my emphasis)
> While to the Lernaean princes the Lemnian exile
> Repeats her story and by a long lament consoles her loss,
> Unmindful *(so the gods impelled her!)* of her absent charge . . .

—whereupon he is struck down by a favourite serpent of Jupiter (505–40). Hypsipyle understands that the death of Opheltes is compensation for the victim that she denied Venus by saving her father Thoas (*exsolui tibi, Lemne, nefas*, 'I have paid you, Lemnos, the crime I owed', 628). The instinctive reaction of Eurydice, mother of Opheltes, is to blame

the gods for her suffering and the fate of her son, who is the first to die in the war (6.143–48). Unaware that the gods have caused Hypsipyle to neglect Opheltes, Eurydice suddenly shifts the blame to the former queen, although she does comprehend that her son is a surrogate victim for Thoas (149ff.).

An Olympian and His Monster: Apollo and Poine

The destructive propensity, extreme cruelty and careless indifference of Apollo is readily apparent in the *Thebaid*. Even the concern that this deity shows for Amphiaraus[91] (e.g., 7.770–93) is more than counterbalanced by his slaughterous rôle on the battlefield and his display of careless unconcern for the wretched victims of the warrior-prophet's *androktasia* he inspires (cf. 690–769). Notable human figures who suffer as the result of Apollonian indifference are Polynices, whose death the god almost causes in the chariot race in order to ensure victory for Amphiaraus (6.491–512), and the charioteer Herses, who is slain when the god deflects the spear of Hypseus on to him in order to save his favourite priest (7.737f.). Apollo also inspires the oracular pronouncement of Amphiaraus that demands Menoeceus' *Opfertod* (10.624, 667, 762f.).

The importance of the Coroebus episode (1.557–672) to the rest of the *Thebaid* can be measured partly by the picture that materialises of Apollo, who plays a major rôle in the events that transpire. In *Thebaid* 1 Adrastus relates the tale of Coroebus to Polynices and Tydeus (557–672). Like the metadiegetic narrative of Hypsipyle (5.49–498), the interpolated tale of Adrastus parallels sub-themes and events treated in the main narrative; it also connects with the story of Hypsipyle.[92] Like Hypsipyle's narrative, the Coroebus episode lies outside the main plot and is not directly concerned with events in the central narrative; furthermore, as in the case of the Hypsipyle episode, the framing-tale concerning Coroebus carries an important message on the consequences of supernaturally incited *furor* that goes uncomprehended by Adrastus and the Argives. The afflictions that Apollo brings upon

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[91] Or for any one of his favourites, such as the votary Daphneus, whom he is unable to assist (*Theb.* 8.453–55).

[92] Cf. Kytzler (1955: 186; 1986: 2916–24), Ahl (1966: 127), Watkiss (1966: 173), Vessey (1970b: 317f.; 1973: 102), Holland (1976: 28f.), Burgess (1978: 231); *contra* Legras (1905: 152, 277), Butler (1909: 211f.), Aricò (1960: 277), Mackay (1965: 295) and Mendell (1967: 124f.).

the Argives in the Coroebus episode parallel the extensive suffering and distress he causes in Argos in the main narrative when he prevents Adrastus and Amphiaraus from comprehending the dire import of his pronouncement on the impending arrival of the monarch's future sons-in-law (cf. 1.395–400).

In the Coroebus episode Apollo forces himself on Psamathe and does nothing to protect her or their child from death (571ff.); as retribution for the execution of Psamathe, the god sends a monster upon Argos that devours innocent children (596–604); and he causes widespread devastation and death by sending a pestilence upon Argos (627–33). These violent deeds and indifference toward the largely innocent Argive populace resemble his and other gods' actions against and unconcern for humanity in the main narrative. As one of a number of deities who interfere in human affairs with disastrous consequences, Apollo manifests his hostility toward humankind by creating and using monsters as calculated agents of supernatural destruction.[93] His sending of the infernally conceived, paedophagous Poine upon Argos (1.596–604) is reminiscent of his creation and sending of a monstrous serpent to upturn Polynices' chariot during the funeral games of Opheltes (6.495ff.).[94] The desire of Apollo for vengeance because of the execution of Psamathe and slaying of Poine is in response to situations that arise as the result of his own initial cruelty and indifference toward humanity; thus a largely innocent populace is made to suffer unjustly for the crime he perpetrates against one of its members.

As in the case of the Hypsipyle story, however, the selfishness of humankind and failure to observe the will of the gods bring the full measure of divine wrath down on it and leads to much suffering and many deaths. The offences of King Crotopus and the Lemnian women have much in common with those of the Argives and Thebans, since they set the events in motion that lead eventually to the deaths of many innocent victims. But in these episodes as well as in the main narrative the gods are even more reproachable, since the severity, scope and application of the penalties they impose on the general

[93] However, Apollo destroys the serpent Pytho, who threatens his oracle (*Theb.* 1.562–69).

[94] Other deities associated with monsters or serpents are Jupiter, whose sacred serpent slays Opheltes (*Theb.* 5.505–40, esp. 538–40); Venus, who fills the marriage chambers in Lemnian homes with twining serpents (5.67f.); and Minerva, whose snakes stand out menacingly from the Gorgon's head on the shield she brandishes (8.762–64; 12.606–09; cf. 2.717).

populace as retribution for the transgressions of a few impious, sinister or (merely) neglectful individuals far exceed the magnitude of the crimes.

The structure of the Coroebus episode (1.557–672) is annular (ABCDEFEDCBA) and centres on an incident highlighting the *pietas* of the main protagonist in the face of pervasive supernatural hostility; the chiastic arrangement depicts the series of disastrous events that afflicts Argos and the eventual restoration of harmony and order:

(A) Prologue (557–61)
(B) Harmony in Argos (prior to Apollo's arrival)
(C) Apollo arrives in Argos (562–90)
- seeks expiation for slaying of the serpent Pytho
- seduces Psamathe; fathers the doomed Linus
(D) King Crotopus demands death of Psamathe (590–95)
(E) Retribution of Apollo (596–604)
- sends monster that consumes children
(F) *Pietas* of Coroebus (604–26)
- slays the monster Poine
(E) Retribution of Apollo (627–35)
- sends plague that kills citizens; destroys crops
(D) Apollo demands death of Poine's slayer (636f.)
(C) Coroebus arrives in Delphi (638–61)
(B) Harmony restored (661–66)
- Coroebus granted life; pestilence lifted
(A) Epilogue (666–68)

Just as the Hypsipyle episode centres on the heroic action of Hypsipyle in rescuing her father from the frenzied Lemnian women (5.240–95), Coroebus' bravery in slaying the monster Poine is the focus of the frame-narrative and occupies the central panel (F); this scene is juxtaposed by displays of divine retribution (E), demands for death (D), scenes of arrival (C) and harmony (B). There is a progression from harmony to discord back to concordance, a pattern that corresponds to the movement of the poem as a whole.

In relating the tale of Coroebus (1.557ff.), Adrastus is depicted as a pious and god-fearing monarch; this is especially evident in the praises he sings to Apollo immediately after recounting the myth (696–720).[95] He commences by declaring that the annual rites in honour of Apollo were established after the Theban populace had been afflicted by great

[95] Dominik (1992: 66–78).

misfortune (557–61). Adrastus recounts Apollo's slaying of the serpent Pytho and his arrival at the palace of Crotopus (562–71). Apollo forces himself on Psamathe, the king's daughter, who is portrayed by Adrastus as young, attractive and virtuous (571–75). Psamathe bears a handsome son named Linus and, fearing for his safety, entrusts him to a shepherd (576–86). As is frequently the case in the epic, the Fates do not permit a favourable destiny (cf. 586f.) and the babe is mangled by fierce dogs (587–90); the princess is unable to conceal her grief and her father discovers what has happened (590–94). The passing of Linus is of paramount significance, for his death anticipates the demise of the infant Opheltes in the main narrative (5.538–42);[96] just as the babe Linus is the first to suffer death undeservedly in a seemingly endless chain of tragic events, so the infant Opheltes is the first innocent victim of a long and costly war caused by the enmity that is aroused between two brothers. After Crotopus hears Psamathe's tale of suffering, he is unmoved and has her executed (1.594f.).

But Apollo is no less to blame than Crotopus. He does nothing to protect his innocent human lover or the child he fathered by her, and in revenge for the death of Psamathe sends a monster Poine upon Argos that devours innocent children (596–604). As in the chariot race where he creates a monster to frighten the steed Arion and thereby nearly causes the death of Polynices (6.495–512), Apollo reveals a careless unconcern for human welfare. After Coroebus pursues and slays the monster with the assistance of his youthful comrades, Apollo brings further misery to Argos by sending a pestilence that results in widespread devastation and death (1.605–33). In his obsession to exact vengeance for the deaths of his human lover and monster, Apollo causes unnecessary death and suffering. The god reveals that the youths who are responsible for the monster's death must be sacrificed before the plague is lifted from Argos (634–37).

The circumstances surrounding Apollo's punishment of Argos in the myth told by Adrastus resemble Jupiter's punishment of Argos and Thebes in the main narrative. In both instances it is difficult to perceive why the mass of innocent Argive inhabitants must suffer for the transgressions of a few individuals in the royal family. Just

[96] This is noted by Vessey (1973: 104); however, Vessey's (1973: 105) contention that the fate of Linus is meant to recall Oedipus' infancy in the mind of the reader is improbable. In the case of Linus, his death is intended to represent the young and innocent of a community who become the tragic victims of a monarch's impious deeds (see chapter two).

as the plan of Jupiter to extirpate the royal houses of Thebes and Argos seems iniquitous because it leads to the deaths of many guiltless victims, so Apollo is capricious in his punishment of innocent people who bear no responsibility for the crime of King Crotopus. On the human level, Crotopus is probably the only figure deserving of harsh retribution, since he is directly accountable for his daughter's execution. The people of Argos are made to suffer not only for the crime of Crotopus in executing Psamathe (cf. 1.584f.) but also for the cruelty (cf. 575) and neglect (cf. 597) of Apollo. This is unquestionably unjust (cf. 648–57). There is no cogent reason why the entire Argive community should suffer for the crimes of Crotopus, despite the importance of his position. The actual punishments dispensed by Apollo far exceed the bounds of natural justice. None of the events would have taken place if it had not been for Apollo's rape of Crotopus' daughter in the first instance. His disastrous intervention in the life of Psamathe precipitates her execution, the death of their child and the numerous deaths of innocent citizens. The monster and pestilence that Apollo sends upon Argos are manifestations of the god's displeasure and symbolic of his own guilt. Apollo is not *directly* responsible for the death of Psamathe and their child, but these incidents stem from his lust for her and subsequent neglect of his human family. The moral of Adrastus' interpolated tale is manifest and enhances one of the important sub-themes of the poem: in the dispensation of divine 'justice', the innocent suffer just as much as, if not more than, the guilty. The metadiegetic narrative functions effectively both to underscore this sub-theme and to presage the greater calamity that later befalls Argos.

In response to the oracular revelation Coroebus journeys to Delphi, acknowledges his guilt, and heroically offers himself as a sacrifice to the vindictive Apollo to save his city from unjust divine retribution (1.641–61). His heroic response to the oracular revelation anticipates the apotropaic *Opfertod* of Menoeceus (10.756ff.), who meets certain death when he plunges into the enemy ranks in order to save Thebes, a suicidal act directly motivated by Virtus ('Virtue', 661–71, 678–81, esp. 672–77). In one sense, Coroebus' willingness to offer himself to Apollo can be viewed as an attempt to atone for the crime of Apollo. In another sense, his devotion can be seen as an attempt to free the Argive community of responsibility for its collective guilt through its association with him. The situation in Argos is analogous to the circumstances of the pestilence that afflicts Thebes earlier under Oedipus. Both Coroebus and Oedipus perform criminal acts that must

be expiated in order for the gods to be propitiated and universal harmony to be restored. The tragedy in both situations resides in the fact that Oedipus and Coroebus become scapegoats for the appeasement of the gods' wrath. However, Coroebus' heroic devotion to his country and to Apollo contrasts greatly with the fateful circumstances surrounding the heroic action of Oedipus in slaying the Sphinx. When Coroebus journeys to Delphi, acknowledges his guilt, and offers himself up to the god, the attitude of the Thebans toward the youth is entirely approbative and laudatory; however, when Oedipus' guilt and responsibility are exposed, the Thebans' attitude toward their regent changes dramatically and they banish him in order to distance themselves from the source of their contamination. Although Coroebus is spared and consequently fails to achieve the immortality and divine status accorded Menoeceus, the Argive hero is immortalised in words through the re-telling of the myth.

When Coroebus offers himself to Apollo as an expiatory sacrifice (1.642ff.), he is highly critical of the deity for his malice in allowing guiltless people to suffer:

'quod si monstra effera magnis
Cara adeo superis, iacturaque uilior orbi
Mors hominum, et saeuo tanta inclementia caelo est,
Quid meruere Argi? me, me, diuum optime, solum
Obiecisse caput Fatis praestabat. an illud
Lene magis cordi quod desolata domorum
Tecta uides, ignique datis cultoribus omnis
Lucet ager?'

(*Theb.* 1.648–55)

'But if savage monsters are so dear
To the mighty gods above, and the death of men is
A cheaper loss to the world, and cruel heaven is so ruthless,
Have the Argives deserved this? It is right that my head alone,
Mine, most honourable of the gods, be offered to the Fates.
Or is it more comforting to your heart that you see
Homes desolate and every field given over to farming
Aflame?'

This criticism and his reference to Apollo as *inique* ('unjust one', 648) exposes the overt irony in his address of Apollo as *diuum optime* ('most honourable of the gods', 651), just as Juno's criticism of Jupiter during the first Olympian council reveals the sarcasm in her invocation of Jupiter (*iustissime diuum*, 'most just of the gods', 250). Coroebus' criticism can easily be applied to the conduct of Jupiter not only when he

arbitrarily involves Argos in his divine scheme to destroy the Theban royal house (cf. 250–82), but also when he does nothing to prevent the deaths of many innocent victims in the execution of his plan (cf. 266, where Juno suggests that Jupiter is compelling contemporary men and women to expiate the sins of their ancestors).

Apollo is apparently moved more by the justice of Coroebus' plea than he is offended by his criticism, since he surprisingly—judging from his behaviour elsewhere—spares the youth and lifts the pestilence from Argos (661–66). Perhaps the willingness of Coroebus to endure the punishment that is rightly Apollo's impresses the deity. A god cannot really exact retribution from one who accepts death willingly, especially when the individual is guilty only of protecting his community from divinely instigated ravages. Of course Apollo would only have confirmed the validity of Coroebus' criticism if he had slain the youth in vengeance.

There is considerable irony in the fact that a mere youth prevails unwittingly over Apollo while a much stronger figure like Capaneus meets an ignoble end when he attempts to oppose the will of Jupiter. But then there is a considerable difference in the way the two figures present themselves to the gods. Coroebus demonstrates the justice of his case and voluntarily offers his life to Apollo, while Capaneus is maddened by his resentment of the gods to such an extent that he believes he can actually challenge and defeat them with impunity. Apollo's action in rewarding the *pietas* of Coroebus stresses the heroic nature of the hero's attempted self-sacrifice. The magnanimity of Coroebus stands in marked contrast to the behaviour of Tydeus and Polynices, to whom Adrastus relates the tale of Coroebus' attempted *Opfertod.* Tydeus and Polynices refuse to give way not only to each other (1.408–27) but also their brothers (cf. 1.402f.; 11.497–573), thus precipitating needless bloodshed and suffering. In the case of Polynices, supernatural powers act to ensure that the exile is given no chance to save his city. The gods' control of the situation in the main narrative is so effective that Polynices could not possibly attempt to emulate the deed of Coroebus. In the *Thebaid* human fortune varies according to the whims of the supernatural powers.

In honour of the favourable turn of events in Argos the citizens establish an annual festival (1.666–68). The final, tragic irony is that Adrastus fails to perceive that the plague and monster are forewarnings of a far greater disaster to come; despite his piety and devotion to Apollo, the fate of Adrastus and the destiny of his people are sealed.

Apollo is indeed, as he admits later (in respect of Amphiaraus), *saeuus* ('cruel', 9.657) and *inmeritusque coli* ('unworthy of being worshipped', 657).

Rôle of an Infernal Spirit: The Ghost of Laius

Even the spirits in the underworld are not immune from the supernatural proclivity toward wanton destructiveness. Mercury accompanies the shade of Laius to the upper world at Jupiter's behest so that the ghost can incite Eteocles to break his agreement of alternate rule with Polynices (2.1ff.). The shade of Laius reveals his malevolence by willingly inciting Eteocles to hatred of his brother and impelling the monarch to retain the throne (102ff., esp. 123–27). As Laius is being escorted to the world above, one of the shades in the underworld, who had offended the gods and now suffers the dire consequences, catches sight of him. (16–18). Filled with bitterness, hatred and envy, the anonymous shade reproaches Laius, citing three supernatural beings who could be responsible for his ascent:[97]

> 'Vade . . . , o felix quoscumque uocaris in usus,
> Seu Iouis imperio, seu maior adegit Erinys
> Ire diem contra, seu te furiata sacerdos
> Thessalis arcano iubet emigrare sepulcro . . .'
> (*Theb.* 2.19–22)
> 'Go . . . , fortunate one, on whatever errand you are called,
> Whether Jove's command or too powerful Erinys drives you
> To greet the day, or whether a frenzied Thessalian witch
> Orders you to come forth from your secret sepulchre . . .'

The connexion of Jupiter with Erinys and a Thessalian witch suggests that his actions resemble those of the infernal powers. Whereas Jupiter plays an imperative rôle on the first occasion that Laius ascends to the upper world (2.1ff.), a Thessalian witch (4.504) and the Furies are given mention just before (633) and during the second occasion (643).

As the shade of Laius approaches Eteocles in Thebes, the monarch is sleeping peacefully, entirely ignorant of his fate:

> pro gnara nihil mortalia fati
> Corda sui! capit ille dapes, habet ille soporem.
> (*Theb.* 2.92f.)

[97] As Legras (1905: 41) and Vessey (1973: 231) observe, the anonymous shade resembles the anonymous Theban who earlier apostrophises Jupiter (*Theb.* 1.171ff., esp. 178–80).

Oh for mortal hearts unaware
Of their destiny! He banquets and he slumbers.

The immediate response of the reader to these lines is almost certainly one of sympathy for Eteocles, since he is portrayed as an innocent and defenceless being whose destiny is determined by preternatural forces beyond his control. In *Thebaid* 1 Jupiter has commanded Mercury to accompany Laius to the upper world where the shade is to persuade Eteocles to keep the throne (292–302). Thus Statius has already established that Eteocles' refusal to surrender the throne to Polynices is engineered primarily through the interference of Jupiter, even though the latter has claimed that the reigning monarch desires to keep the throne of his own accord (cf. 1.300).

This impression of supernatural control over events on earth is enhanced in the scene that follows closely upon the arrival of Laius' shade in Thebes. Laius disguises himself as Tiresias to acquire greater credibility before he addresses Eteocles (2.94ff.). The ghost commences his speech by admonishing the monarch for his idleness and lack of concern for the actions of Polynices:

'Non somni tibi tempus, iners qui nocte sub alta
Germani secure iaces, ingentia dudum
Acta uocant rerumque graues, ignaue, paratus.'
(*Theb.* 2.102–04)

'This is no time for you to sleep, sloucher, who in the dark night
Lie unanxious about your brother; monstrous feats long beckon,
Sluggard, and critical preparations for the future.'

Laius' shade proceeds to tell Eteocles that his brother, encouraged by his Argive union and bond with Tydeus, is confidently plotting against him to seize the Theban throne (108–14). Laius' reproach of Eteocles actually demonstrates the monarch's innocence, since his repose and lack of concern over the activities of Polynices show clearly that he has not yet contemplated seriously the possibility of retaining the throne.

On the other hand, the accusation levelled by Laius against Polynices concerning the exiled prince's alleged intention to recover the throne by violent means is a gross distortion of the truth, for up to this point in the text there has been no substantive demonstration of Polynices' desire to ascend the throne—overwhelming as this longing is (cf. 1.314–23)—by a path other than the one negotiated amicably with Eteocles (cf. 138ff.). Even the exile's decision to journey to Argos, the result

of which is his acquisition of the means to gain the Theban throne by force if desired, is depicted as an action motivated by any one of three forces outside of his control—Erinys, Fors ('Chance') or Atropos (324–28). There has been no firm resolve on the part of Polynices—in spite of 314ff.—or the Argives to commence war with Thebes in order to gain the throne for the exiled prince; nor has there been any real indication prior to the harmful intervention of the gods that such a step may be necessary.

Laius is not content with these deceptions, but misrepresents Jupiter's purpose in asserting that the god has sent him to Eteocles out of pity to forewarn the monarch of Polynices' evil intentions (2.115f.). He conveys the supreme ruler's direction to Eteocles to retain the throne:

> 'habe Thebas, caecumque cupidine regni,
> Ausurumque eadem, germanum expelle, nec ultra
> Fraternos inhiantem obitus sine fidere coeptis
> Fraudibus aut Cadmo dominas inferre Mycenas.'
> (*Theb.* 2.116–19)
>
> 'Keep Thebes, and drive out your brother, blind with the lust of a realm,
> Who will dare the same against you, nor permit him, wanting his
> Brother's death, to trust further in the perfidy he conspires
> Or to bring Mycenaean lords to rule over Cadmus.'

Laius' claim that Polynices is blind with desire for power and will stop at nothing to achieve his ends is designed to play on the latent fears of Eteocles, who up until this moment has not had reason to fear his brother. Eteocles must be partly exonerated for his subsequent refusal to abdicate in view of Jupiter's command.

The impression that Eteocles is caught up in events beyond his ability to control is stressed further when Laius' ghost sheds blood over him from the wound in his throat (122–24). The wound is obviously the one made by Oedipus in the fatal confrontation with his father. Laius' action suggests the transference of the royal family's guilt and inimical aspect to Eteocles. Laius leaves nothing to chance in order to ensure the completion of his objective. He is not satisfied merely to reproach Eteocles and leave the monarch to act as he sees fit; nor does he rest content with stressing the necessity of obeying the orders of the supreme god. The preternatural apparition's final act of spilling blood on Eteocles seals the fate of the monarch. Secure

in the knowledge of his mission's success, the shade of Laius departs. When Eteocles awakens, he is full of horror and hatred for his brother and desires to wage war against him (125–27). His transformation is complete, as is stressed in the subsequent simile where he is likened to a tigress carrying off a man to feed her cubs (128–32). The effectiveness of Laius' action is unquestionable.

The ghost of Laius journeys to the upper world again at the behest of the Tiresias in 4.604ff., an ascent prognosticated in the reference to necromancy during the shade's first coming (cf. 2.19–22). When beseeched by the priest to prophesy the result of the war (4.620f.), Laius announces that he will divulge only what Lachesis and Megaera permit him to reveal about the outcome of the war (635f.). He predicts the defeat of the Argives, the *katabasis* of Amphiaraus, the violent death of Capaneus, the deaths of many brave heroes, and Eteocles' refusal to permit burial of the Argive corpses (637–41). But it is the last part of his prophecy that proves perplexing to Tiresias and his priestess. According to Laius, Thebes will be victorious, but it is Oedipus who will gain the final triumph, not Eteocles:

'certa est uictoria Thebis
(Ne trepida), nec regna ferox germanus habebit
Sed Furiae; geminumque nefas miserosque per enses
(Ei mihi!) crudelis uincit pater.'
(*Theb.* 4.641–44)

'Victory is certain for Thebes
(Don't fret), nor will your fierce brother possess your realm
But rather the Furies. By twin crime and wretched swords
(Ah me!) your cruel father prevails.'

The reference to the possession of Thebes by the Furies shows that the city's inhabitants have little control over their own lives and are being manipulated by superhuman forces. Although Tiresias and Manto do not comprehend the foreboding meaning of Laius' prophecy (644f.), the war will bring a hollow victory for Thebes, since the supernaturally inspired wish of Oedipus will be fulfilled in the mutually destructive duel between her two leading citizens.

Through their actions the various supernatural powers are instrumental in inciting humanity to bloodshed and violence. Without their frequent harmful interventions, especially those of Jupiter, Pluto and

the Furies, the motivation for much of the human action in the *Thebaid* would be lacking.[98] Presumably Oedipus would not have uttered his curse against his sons; there would have been no quarrel between the brothers and probably no decision to rule alternately (rather than together in harmony); Eteocles would not have refused to step down peacefully from the throne; nor would Polynices have been driven to seize power violently from his brother; and there would have been no war and certainly no fratricide. The causality of these events is wholly attributable to the Furies; there is no evidence in the text to suggest that the actions of these heroes would have occurred without the *direct* intervention of these malevolent goddesses. It is equally wrong to consider the Furies as deifications of latent forces of human evil, destruction and revenge,[99] since Statius goes to considerable length to emphasise the objective status of the Furies within the narrative framework of the poem. Of course Statius could have shifted the motivation from the supernatural to human level and made the action comprehensible in purely psychological terms, but he is intent upon stressing the malevolence and the unceasing hostility of the gods toward humanity as prime causative factors behind man's seemingly determined rush toward self-destruction.[100]

The concentration of the poet in the battle narrative (7.632–11.572) upon the Seven, whose destructive behaviour is divinely motivated and whose deaths—with the exception of those of Tydeus and of course Adrastus, who survives the war—can be attributed to the harmful intervention of the gods, bears testimony to the ultimate futility of human life in the face of overwhelming supernatural opposition. Even a minor supernatural power like the river god Ismenos is able to wreak vengeance upon man, as he assails Hippomedon for his slaying of Crenaeus and weakens the hero so that he is unable to repel his Theban attackers (9.445ff.).

[98] *Contra* Ahl (1966: 43), who contends that there 'does not appear to be a single instance in the *Thebaid* where the intervention of the gods . . . prompts an individual to an action utterly out of keeping with his character and previous disposition'.

[99] As do Lewis (1936: 54), Schetter (1960: 5ff.), Venini (1964: 201ff.), Snijder (1968: 15), Vessey (1971a: 375; 1973: 75; 1982: 578), Moreland (1975: 21 n. 4) and Feeney (1991: 376ff.).

[100] *Contra* Vessey (1971a: 375), who contends that Statius' 'narrative shows a trend toward psychological motivation; events spring from the inner nature of his characters, not from external causes'.

The depressing *Weltanschauung* that Statius presents in the *Thebaid* depicts a hostile universe in which the innocent are likely to become the victims of supernatural vindictiveness just as much as the flagitious. The obvious futility of actively opposing Olympian oppression and injustice, as demonstrated in the suicidal challenge of Capaneus to the physical power of Jupiter (10.897ff.), or of merely raising one's voice in protest against the iniquities of divine rule (e.g., 5.610f.; 6.143f.; 9.71f.), attests to the overwhelming power of the gods and their general unconcern for the plight of humanity. Man's occasional displays of rebellion or bitterness against his divine oppressors are evidence that the abuse of supernatural power is likely to inspire intense hatred of divine authority rather than respect for or even fear of such authority. This expression of contempt for the gods only serves to epitomise the helplessness of man in being unable to effect any improvement in his position.

CHAPTER TWO

PURSUIT AND ABUSE OF MONARCHAL POWER

Power, like the diamond, dazzles the beholder, and also the wearer; it dignifies meanness; it magnifies littleness; to what is contemptible, it gives authority; to what is low, exaltation. Power will intoxicate the best hearts, as wine the strongest heads. No man is wise enough, no man good enough, to be trusted with unlimited power.

Charles Colton[1]

Faculty and Institution: Power and Monarchy

The attitude of Statius toward the institution of monarchy is unequivocal. Major episodes (1.164–95; 2.384–3.113; 10.268–314; 11.648–761)—the first two accompanied by a suitable apostrophe or editorial comment (1.165–68; 3.99–113)—exemplify his hostile attitude toward the inevitable tyranny of monarchy.[2] In each scene words of reproach—couched in the form of a rhetorical *uituperatio regis*—directed at the reigning monarch by one of his subjects represent the hostility of the populace toward their ruler. A vivid picture of the lust for *nuda potestas* ('raw power', 1.150) and its destructive consequences is framed around the claim of Polynices to the throne and determination of Eteocles to maintain sovereignty over Thebes. The debasement of the brothers results from Polynices' insatiable quest for monarchal power (cf. 1.314–23; 2.307–21; 4.88f.) and Eteocles' abuse of his position and desire to retain the throne (cf. 2.399). This picture of a corrupt monarchy extends to Eteocles' predecessors and successor. The actions of Oedipus, Laius and Creon are consistent with the pattern of monarchal cruelty established over successive generations of rule in Thebes.

The actions of Adrastus and Theseus do not on the surface conform to this pattern of tyrannical monarchy. But the monarchs are not immune from destructive influences. Statius occasionally emphasises the benevolence, piety and self-restraint of Adrastus as well as the

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[1] Colton (1823: no. 427).

[2] Hartman (1916: 359–65) cites the passages in the *Thebaid* that he contends are critical of monarchy: 1.138–49; 3.83–85, 99–102, 216f.; 5.241f., 321f.; 8.260–63, 286–88, 678f.; 10.179–81, 699–701; 11.263f., 574–79, 654f., 684, 701–03; 12.196–200, 504f., 590f., 771–73.

civilising rôle of Theseus, but overall this plays a relatively minor part in the presentation of institutional monarchy in the poem. In fact the poet extends his despairing picture of institutional monarchy to include the actions of these seemingly just and benevolent regents; for not even they are untainted by the madness that afflicts participants in war. Adrastus ignores omens that portend disaster for Argos by warring against Thebes (cf. 3.456–58, 499–551, 619–47) and enthusiastically sanctions the cowardly nocturnal attack on the Theban camp in which the victims are mercilessly slain while sleeping (10.227–44, esp. 236–44; 266–68). Theseus shows a similar eagerness for the slaughter of war (12.595). When the Athenians mow down the helpless Thebans on the battlefield, Theseus is at the forefront of the conflict and wreaks destruction among the Thebans on the battlefield (730ff.). The Athenian monarch easily slays a multitude of Theban warriors (741–51), including Creon, whom he dispatches quickly without showing even a trace of mercy (768–82).

Actual or attempted crimes of the monarchs Crotopus and Lycurgus in the digressive episodes enhance the overall impression of monarchy as a cruel and oppressive institution that inflicts widespread and longstanding suffering upon subjects largely innocent of wrongdoing. As instanced by the response of Crotopus to the plight of Psamathe in the Coroebus episode:

> nec motus et atro
> Imperat (infandum!) cupientem occumbere leto.
> (*Theb.* 1.594f.)
> Nor is he moved, but commands her
> (Oh unspeakable!), even as she longs, to suffer grim death.

Crotopus is not only selfish and cruel in his treatment of his daughter, but he shows little respect for the gods by not recognising the favourable aspects of her union with Apollo. The obduracy of Crotopus discourages Psamathe from telling him of the union and child in the first place, and this leads indirectly to the initial tragedy of the child's death; the king's selfishness and inhumanity are realised when he cruelly demands the death of his daughter despite her innocence; this in turn sets off a chain of events that results in further needless suffering and death for the inhabitants of Argos. Although Psamathe presumably would have enjoyed a contented life without the intrusion of Apollo into her world (573f.), she suffers primarily because of her father's pitilessness and warped sense of honour.

The portrayal of Crotopus is consistent with the picture of the tyrannical monarch that emerges elsewhere in the poem. With the notable exception of Adrastus and to a lesser extent Theseus, monarchs are almost invariably prone to violence and cruelty. A clear parallel exists between the fierce Crotopus in the myth of Coroebus and ruthless monarchs such as Eteocles and Creon in the main narrative. The cruelty of Crotopus is nearly repeated just after the Hypsipyle episode when the enraged Lycurgus is barely prevented from murdering the hapless Hypsipyle, whom he holds culpable for the death of his son Opheltes (5.654–67). Brief mention in the main narrative of other kings who are renowned for their cruelty—Amycus of Bithynia (3.342f.), Busiris of Egypt (12.155), and Diomedes (156) and Tereus of Thrace (480)—further strengthens this unfavourable impression of monarchy.

There is the important question of the rôle of supernatural forces in monarchal behaviour in the *Thebaid*. Without the frequent harmful intervention of supernatural powers, the motivation for much of the action of monarchs in the poem would be lacking. The mutual hatred and suspicion of Eteocles and Polynices and their craving for power are prompted by various supernatural deities such as Tisiphone (1.123ff.) in response to the plea of Oedipus (56–87) and are later fuelled by her with the aid of Megaera (11.57–579, esp. 150–54, 197–203, 208f., 383–89) at the behest of Pluto (8.69–71). Oedipus is under the perpetual influence of the Furies when he utters his curse against his sons (1.51f.); the decrepit shade of Laius acts at the behest of Jupiter when it urges Eteocles to retain the throne (295–301; cf. 303ff.; 2.1f.); and the cruel decree of Creon forbidding the burial of Theban corpses is motivated directly by Tisiphone under orders from Pluto (8.72–74; cf. 12.94–102 and more particularly 590f.).

The rôle of the gods in determining the behaviour of Adrastus and in sanctioning the actions of Theseus is less direct but nonetheless critical. The Argive monarch Adrastus makes repeated attempts to avert war (cf. 2.367–70; 3.388–93, 440–49; 4.38–41) and the duel between the sons of Oedipus (11.433–35), but he is powerless to prevent the war or fratricide against the wishes of the gods. What is more disturbing is his enthusiastic sanction of the cowardly slaughter of sleeping warriors in the Theban camp (10.236–44, 266–68). For the actions of Adrastus just before the Argive massacre are anything but admirable (227–44, 266–68); it appears initially that his behaviour cannot be so easily accounted for in supernatural terms as his undertaking of war, since there is no specific depiction of a god inspiring

him to a lust for bloodshed prior to the massacre. However, the narrative makes clear that the supernatural infection of the *uates* Thiodamas with a sudden frenzy has an effect on all the Argives, including Adrastus (219–21). Still it must be remembered that despite the divine infusion of the Lemnian women with hatred (5.85–169, esp. 155–58) and *furor* (195–240) Hypsipyle remains unaffected. The effect of Adrastus' failure to remain similarly untainted is to demonstrate the vulnerability of even a mostly just and pious man to the destructive influences of malevolent supernatural powers.[3] He represents an interesting contrast to a monarch like Theseus, who meets no divine resistance—in fact the Athenian is aided by the patron goddess of his city (cf. 12.606–10)—precisely because of his violent and destructive venture against Thebes. Despite the omnipresence and intervention of the supernatural powers, the consequences of the pursuit of kingship and the customary abuse of monarchal power in the *Thebaid* are manifest.

Pretender and Monarch: Polynices and Eteocles

Cupido dominandi cunctis affectibus flagrantior est ('The desire for power burns more fiercely than all the passions', Tac. *Ann.* 15.53). In the *Thebaid* pursuit of power corrupts as much as power itself (cf. 1.150–65; 4.397–404). The claim of Polynices to the Theban throne is just, as the narrative demonstrates (3.342; 4.79f.; 8.615; 11.540–42). Other direct or oblique references to the justice of his cause occur in the speeches of Argia (3.696–98), Adrastus (712f.), the queen of the Bacchanals (4.403–06), Jocasta (7.508–10), and Antigone (11.365–67, 379–81). Polynices also defends his claim to the throne in 2.358–62. If his claim is just—and numerous statements in the narrative and speeches point to the justice of his cause—then clearly he *has* been wronged.[4]

But Polynices is no less a *potential* despot than Eteocles, behaving differently from his brother only because he has not ascended the throne:[5]

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[3] The same is true of Thiodamas, whose assumption of *vatic* power after Amphiaraus' *katabasis* (*Theb.* 8.277ff.) represents a model succession (the gods do not interfere); however, Thiodamas is incited to martial violence just as Adrastus (10.227–44, 266–68; cf. 219–221) and his sacerdotal predecessor are (7.703f.; cf. 695–98).

[4] *Contra* Ahl (1966: 23): 'The kingdom is [Polynices'] right because he is Polynices, and that is all.... This is not a wronged brother . . .'.

[5] Cf. Ahl (1966: 22; 1986: 2829, 2852).

Cernis, ut erectum torua sub fronte minetur
Saeuior adsurgens dempto consorte potestas.
Quas gerit ore minas, quanto premit omnia fastu!
Hicne umquam priuatus erit? tamen ille precanti
Mitis et adfatu bonus et patientior aequi.
Quid mirum? non solus erat.

(*Theb.* 1.186–91)

You see how the supreme monarch, his consort exiled,
Stands erect more fiercely and threatens under stern gaze.
What menace his face bears! With what pride he overwhelms all!
Will this man ever accept subject rank? But the other was
Kind toward the suppliant, sensibly spoken, and more just.
What wonder? He was not alone.

Not only is the claim of Polynices to the throne just, but he also does not display Eteocles' qualities as a tyrant. But Polynices is not superior morally in any sense to his brother or more deserving of sympathy, as Tydeus believes (cf. 2.462–66), since both men are equally capable of abusing monarchal power.[6]

Collingwood attributes the following belief to Tacitus: 'Power does not alter a man's character; it only shows what kind of man he already was'.[7] Polynices accords. His character is corrupted by his craving for power rather than, as in the case of his brother, the acquisition of power. As soon as Polynices goes into voluntary exile, he broods over the kingdom that should have been his according to the pact of alternate rule he made with his brother (1.314–16). In fact Polynices is obsessed:

tenet una dies noctesque recursans
Cura uirum, si quando humilem decedere regno
Germanum et semet Thebis opibusque potitum
Cerneret.

(*Theb.* 1.316–19)

One thought recurring day and night
Grips him, that he might see his ignoble brother
Forsake the kingdom and himself lord of Thebes
And all its power.

[6] *Contra* Glaesener (1899: 100–02), Legras (1905: 212f.), ten Kate (1955: 53ff.), Schetter (1960: 117) and Gossage (1972: 205), who consider Polynices to be superior to Eteocles in temperament and maintain that the exile arouses greater sympathy than the monarch for his cause. Polynices may be a more multi-faceted character than Eteocles, but Statius is intent upon stressing that Polynices possesses the same capacity for cruel leadership as his brother.

[7] Collingwood (1946: 44).

Excessive pride and arrogance index his potential for tyranny and cause him to contemplate the fall of his brother and his own accession to the throne (319–23). This *hubris* is the same quality that informs the personalities of Theban monarchs such as Eteocles and Creon.

Except for a brief period coinciding with his marriage to Argia, Polynices remains preoccupied with the acquisition of monarchal power. Only twelve days after his marriage he turns his attention again to the throne at Thebes:

Ismenius heros
Respicere ad Thebas iamque et sua quaerere regna.
Quippe animum subit illa dies, qua, sorte benigna
Fratris, Echionia steterat priuatus in aula,
Respiciens descisse deos trepidoque tumultu
Dilapsos comites—nudum latus omne fugamque
Fortunae. namque una soror producere tristis
Exulis ausa uias; etiam hanc in limine primo
Liquerat et magna lacrimas incluserat ira.
(*Theb.* 2.307–15)

The Ismenian hero
Turned his mind toward Thebas and already was seeking his kingdom.
For he recalls that day when, the lot favouring his brother,
He had stood dispossessed in the Echionian palace
Seeing the gods desert him and his comrades flee
Amidst panic and uproar, exposed on every side
And bereft of fortune. For only one sister dared
To lead the exile along his sad path; even her he left,
Scarce on his way, and suppressed his tears beneath profound wrath.

The despotic potentiality of Polynices impresses. He takes care to distinguish between his supporters and his opponents in preparation for the day he succeeds Eteocles in lording it over Thebes (316–19; cf. 448). The exile is grieved and angered over being denied his place on the throne and is totally obsessed with gaining power in Thebes (cf. 319–32). Despite his considerable standing in the royal hierarchy of Argos, Polynices will not count his blessings until he fulfils his ambition of ascending the Theban throne.

Statius uses the relationships between Polynices, Eteocles and Tydeus to alienate the reader's sympathy from both brothers and to focus attention upon the cost of institutional monarchy in individual loss and suffering. Specifically the efformative relationship between Polynices and Tydeus exemplifies the consequences of lust for monarchal power. After Polynices takes shelter from a violent storm at the entrance to the Theban palace (1.386–89), he is unwilling to share his place of

refuge with Tydeus who arrives on the scene a short time later (401–10). A brawl ensues (418ff.). Adrastus intervenes and seeks an explanation for the cause of the quarrel, whereupon Tydeus quickly replies:

'tecto caelum prohibere quis iste
Arcuit? an quoniam prior haec ad limina forte
Molitus gressus?'
(*Theb.* 1.455–57; cf. 452–55, 457–65)
'Who was that man to prevent me from taking shelter
From the sky? Or was it because he happened to make his way
First to this threshold?'

It is ironic that Polynices is no more eager to share his resting place with Tydeus than Eteocles is willing to alternate rule with his brother. Indeed Polynices would act no differently from Eteocles in attempting to retain the throne if the position of the brothers were reversed.[8]

Nec uero imperia expetenda ac potius aut non accipienda interdum aut deponenda non numquam ('Power is in fact so undesirable that sometimes it should be either rejected or relinquished', Cic. *Off.* 1.20.68). Hypsipyle's reaction to being pressured against her will to assume the throne of Lemnos suggests a similar belief:

'subeo (pro dira potestas!)
Exangue imperium . . .'
(*Theb.* 5.324f.)
'I succeed (dreadful power!)
To a blood-exhausted rule . . .'

Even though her accession is peaceful and orderly, the pious Hypsipyle views it as a punishment for feigning credibly the murder and funeral of her father (320–25; cf. 313–19). The brothers should have learned the lesson implicit in Cicero's admonition and Hypsipyle's disaffection for power only too well, given the grim fates of Laius and Oedipus. As Statius observes in connexion with Adrastus, the least objectionable regent in the *Thebaid*, *agit miseranda potestas / inuigilare malis* ('distressing power compels him to be vigilant against ill fortune', 8.262f.).

Polynices and Tydeus reconcile (2.365f.). Tydeus volunteers to go to Thebes as an emissary to urge Eteocles to abide by his agreement of alternate rule (370ff.). His mission fails. On his homeward journey Tydeus is set upon by a select band of Theban warriors sent by the treacherous Eteocles to assassinate him (538ff.). The Calydonian slays

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[8] Cf. Ahl (1966: 24; 1986: 2833, 2885).

all but one of the men. His exhortation to war and terrible appearance upon his return prompt an emotional reply from Polynices in which the exile skilfully feigns anger for his brother's treachery and his shame over not having gone to represent his own cause (3.367ff.; cf. 381f.). Polynices' sole concern is his own quest for power. The exile shows no hesitation in exploiting his position in Argos to achieve his aim in Thebes. He looks upon his marriage to Argia and more particularly his friendship with Tydeus as a means of gaining power in Thebes. It is only when Tydeus is dead that Polynices comes to appreciate the nobility and unselfishness of his faithful comrade (cf. 9.32–85, esp. 49–72). The demise of Tydeus exemplifies the tragic fate of numerous victims on both sides of the war who suffer death as the result of the power struggle between the brothers. Notwithstanding the responsibility that Statius places upon the supernatural powers, especially Jupiter and the Furies, for the actions of Polynices (e.g., 1.123ff., esp. 125–30; 7.215ff., 466ff., esp. 467; 11.57ff., esp. 136ff., 150ff., 197ff., 403ff.; cf. 11.576), the poet still goes to considerable lengths to emphasise Polynices' arrogance, cunning, *furor*, *impietas*, fear, obsession for power, and his revengeful and envious spirit (cf. 1.316–23; 2.313–32; 3.365–82; 6.316–26; 11.97–112, 497–573).

The poet's apostrophe of Eteocles upon his accession reveals the complacency and tyranny of the new monarch:

'quis tunc tibi, saeue,
Quis fuit ille dies, uacua cum solus in aula
Respiceres ius omne tuum cunctosque minores,
Et nusquam par stare caput!'
(*Theb.* 1.165–68)

'What a day that was for you,
Cruel tyrant, when alone in your empty palace
You beheld all power your own, all citizens subject,
And nowhere a head unbowed!'

This passage adumbrates one of power's central concepts of 'tyranny upon accession' early in the poem: for immediately upon mounting the throne Eteocles assumes the mantle of tyranny. Earlier the narrative lists the personal qualities of Eteocles and Polynices as claimants to the throne (125–29), including *attonitus motus* ('wild passions'), *furor* ('madness'), *inuidia* ('envy'), *metus* ('fear'), *odium* ('hatred'), *regendi amor* ('love of power') and *ambitus* ('ambition'), characteristics that define the actions of Eteocles upon accession. And so the Thebans are dissatisfied with Eteocles as monarch and desirous of being ruled by

Polynices (168ff.). The vituperative speech of the anonymous Theban gives vent to the frustrations of his compatriots, compelled to endure the tyrannical rule of Eteocles and political uncertainties brought about by the brothers' pact of alternate rule (173–96; cf. 2.443–45).

A significant episode comprises Tydeus' mission to Thebes and the abuse of monarchal power by Eteocles (2.384–3.113). Significant because it indexes the inherent tyranny of monarchy. The interaction between the tyrant Eteocles and ambassador Tydeus illustrates the human cost of maintaining absolute power. As Tydeus approaches the court, the narrative depicts Eteocles as the paradigmatically cruel and overbearing monarch:

> ibi durum Eteoclea cernit
> Sublimem solio saeptumque horrentibus armis.
> Iura ferus populo trans legem ac tempora regni
> Iam fratris de parte dabat; sedet omne paratus
> In facinus queriturque fidem tam sero reposci.
> (*Theb.* 2.384–88)
> There he sees the stern Eteocles
> High upon his throne surrounded by terrible weapons.
> He was ruling the people harshly beyond his lawful term
> In place of his brother. He sits, ready for every crime,
> And complains that his promise has gone unclaimed too long.

Eteocles rejects the claim to the throne made by Tydeus on behalf of Polynices (415–51) and the hatred of Thebans for their monarch is stressed (480f.).

Eteocles promptly resolves to send out a party of Thebans to ambush Tydeus on his return to Argos, a cowardly action represented as typical of Theban monarchs—although it is significant that Jupiter claims responsibility for instigating the crime of Eteocles (3.235–38)—yet one that would be surpassed in cruelty if it were his brother the monarch had power to destroy:

> Nec piger ingenio scelerum fraudisque nefandae
> Rector eget. iuuenum fidos, lectissima bello
> Corpora, nunc pretio, nunc ille hortantibus ardens
> Sollicitat dictis, nocturnaque proelia saeuus
> Instruit, et (sanctum populis per saecula nomen)
> Legatum insidiis tacitoque inuadere ferro
> (Quid regnis non uile?) cupit. quas quaereret artes
> Si fratrem, Fortuna, dares? o caeca nocentum
> Consilia! o semper timidum scelus!
> (*Theb.* 2.482–90)

Nor is the monarch slow or lacking in invention of crime
And of heinous deceit. A faithful band of select men
He incites with passion now by bribery,
Then by forceful speech, cruelly plotting nocturnal strife,
And longs to assault in stealth the envoy (a name held sacred
By peoples through generations) by treachery and sword.
(What does power hold not cheap?) What ruses would he contrive,
Fortune, if you were to give up his brother? O blind counsels
Of the guilty! O ever faint-hearted crime!

The poet then relates the victory of Tydeus over the fifty Thebans sent to assassinate him (523–743) and juxtaposes this narrative with a soliloquy revealing the fear of Eteocles and his anxiety over the success of the mission (3.6f., 9–18; cf. 1–6). Climax of the entire scene is the bitter vituperation of Eteocles by Maeon, the only warrior to survive the mission and return to Thebes (3.59ff.). His account of Eteocles' crimes and their consequences for Thebes (71–77) summarises the disastrous effects of tyranny upon an innocent populace.

The outburst of Maeon incenses Eteocles (77f.). Tyranny is emblematised in wicked liegemen (Labdacus and Phlegyas) who flank the monarch and eagerly prepare to do the augur harm (79–81; cf. 11.686f.). Maeon pauses momentarily (82f.) to reflect on whether to take his own life or allow Eteocles to slay him before proclaiming:

'numquam tibi sanguinis huius
Ius erit aut magno feries imperdita Tydeo
Pectora; uado equidem exultans ereptaque Fata
Insequor et comites feror expectatus ad umbras.
Te superis fratrique—'
(*Theb.* 3.83–87)

'You shall never have right
To this blood or strike the breast unrent by great Tydeus;
I go, truly exultant and pursue the Fates snatched from me;
I am borne away to the shades of my waiting companions.
You, to the gods and your brother—'

The hero's obvious desire for death is revealed especially in this passage and in 65–71. The aposiopesis effectively prepares us for the subsequent description of Maeon's suicide (87ff.).

Ahl and McGuire, following Barth, believe it is not immediately clear whether Maeon intends to strike Eteocles with his sword or plunge it into himself;[9] in addition, Ahl suggests that it is not until after 91

[9] Ahl (1986: 2889), McGuire (1990: 30f.) and Barth (1664: *ad Theb.* 3.79–83).

(presumably 92) that the reader is sure a suicide rather than assassination has occurred.[10] Immediately after Maeon draws his sword (81–83) he makes clear his resolve not to let Eteocles or his bodyguards harm him (83–88). Admittedly the use of *ille* in the phrase *ille dolori pugnat* ('he fights against the pain', 88) would create doubt in the reader's mind as to whether Maeon himself or Eteocles is the recipient of the blow described in 87f. (*et iam media orsa loquentis / absciderat plenum capulo latus*, 'Even as he spoke he had driven the sword in his side to the hilt'), if Maeon had not already included himself among the fifty Thebans slain whose spirits would haunt Eteocles incessantly (75–77). Maeon's evident longing for death and Stoic overtones of the scene point to suicide rather than assassination.

Maeon takes his own life in order to deny the timorous Eteocles the satisfaction of avenging the injury to his pride (81–91), an event that would minimise his glorification. Maeon not only has no fear of impending death, but acclaims it publicly as his destiny. He seeks death voluntarily because he is convinced that destiny has ordained this particular moment for his death. The heroism shown by the pious augur affords a striking contrast to the pusillanimity displayed by Eteocles in dispatching fifty warriors to ambush Tydeus. Although Maeon feels shame in being spared by Tydeus, he achieves a certain immortality in being spared by the superhuman figure; furthermore, he attains glory and honour in his defiant stance toward the truculent Eteocles and in boldly meeting his fate. The poet's apostrophe of the augur arrests:

> Tu tamen egregius fati mentisque nec umquam
> (Sic dignum est) passure situm, qui comminus ausus
> Vadere contemptum reges, quaque ampla ueniret
> Libertas, sancire uiam . . .
> (*Theb.* 3.99–102)
> But you, celebrated in your fate and courage, you who will
> (You deserve this) never endure obscurity, you who dare
> To despise a monarch in person, and to consecrate
> The path of real liberty . . .

Maeon's open resistance to the authority of Eteocles is heroic and his death a release from the persecution of a tyrant. The use of *libertas* ('freedom', 3.102) shows that Statius views Maeon's display of public

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[10] Ahl (1986: 2889). McGuire (1990: 30f.) argues that the reader is unsure until *Theb.* 3.93.

defiance against the monarch as a blow against despotism and usurpation. The political concept of *libertas* further suggests that the poet views Maeon's death as a release from the persecution of a tyrant. Later Antigone and Argia assert *libertas* and frustrate the tyranny of Eteocles in much the same way as Maeon when they demonstrate an eagerness to be captured (12.459f.) and willingly embrace death (456f.; 679–81).

Eteocles, angered and feeling cheated by Maeon's suicide, betrays the impiety of his rule in a desperate act of vengeance by denying proper burial to the augur's corpse (3.96–98). Precursor of the similar action of impious Creon in the final book (12.94–102), this lack of reverence for the dead is paradigmatic of tyrants. Even the animals display a reverence for Maeon's corpse that is antithetic to the sensibilities of an impious tyrant: the wild beasts and birds leave the augur's body and clothes inviolate and guard his corpse (3.111–13). The fifty Thebans sent needlessly to their deaths by Eteocles and the spontaneous outpouring of grief of the deceased warriors' relatives reveal the disastrous consequences of tyranny to the Theban community (114–78). A general scene of lamentation arouses pathos for the unfortunate victims and surviving relatives and illustrates the extreme suffering experienced by a people subject to a cruel monarch (114–32). The entire episode culminates in the consolatory speech of aged Aletes (179–213). He makes reference to the tragic loss of innocent lives under the rule of a cruel tyrant (206–08) and to the crimes of Eteocles (214f.). The speech of Aletes, whose end is near, is viewed as a means of achieving a final moment of glory in defiance of tyranny. Like Maeon's suicide, it succeeds.

Eteocles next appears just before his duel with Polynices (11.205ff.). The monarch argues violently with Creon, who rebukes him bitterly for hesitating to accept his brother's challenge (262–314). As in the Maeon episode (3.169–73, 206–15), there is mention of the tragic loss of innocent lives, the suffering and misfortune endured by a weak and helpless people subject to the caprices of the tyrannical Eteocles, and their contempt for him (11.269–96). But the poet carefully shifts away from Polynices any consequential sympathy by presenting the challenger just as unfavourably as the reigning monarch. Just before the Furies drive the brothers on the dusty plain for their fatal confrontation (11.403ff.), Polynices is jaundiced when he spots Eteocles' accoutrements, despite the splendour of his own trappings (396–402). As Polynices apparently triumphs (540–47), he betrays his cruelty and

vindictiveness in a spontaneous expression of exultation (548–51). The pretender's cause is just, but at the moment of truth he shows himself to be no less shameless and implacable—and therefore no more deserving of our sympathy—than his tyrannous brother.[11]

The dual fratricide bears ultimate testimony to the disastrous consequences of the pursuit and abuse of monarchal power. Statius alludes to the causal agency of the Furies in bringing about the fratricide by urging them to spare the afflictions of man and to prevent a similar deed from occurring in the future (576–78). But he does not exonerate Polynices and Eteocles for committing the act. The poet expresses hope that memory of the crime will fade except in the minds of future monarchs (574f., 578f.), presumably as a warning on the consequences of pursuing and abusing power. However, the Stygian goddesses do not allow this deed to remain long in the memory of succeeding monarchs. When the corpse of Polynices is driven from the funeral pyre of Eteocles (12.429–36), Antigone is moved to exclaim:

> 'Nil actum bello; miseri, sic, dum arma mouetis
> Vicit nempe Creon!'
> (*Theb.* 12.442f.; cf. 11.650–53)
> 'In vain the war was fought: while you struggle thus, wretched ones,
> Creon doubtless has won!'

As Vespasian is reported once to have reflected, *imperium cupientibus nihil medium inter summa et praecipitia* ('in the struggle for power, there is no mean between the heights and destruction', Tac. *Hist.* 2.74). In the case of the brothers, their destruction (*praecipitia*) has paved the bloodless path to power (*summa*) of Creon. But the reign of the new monarch is brief. Abuse of monarchal power by Creon—who like his predecessors ignores the lessons of the past—leads to his downfall.

Successor and Predecessor: Creon and Oedipus

The scene in which Eteocles' successor Creon figures in the penultimate book underscores the inherent nature of monarchy as a cruel institution

[11] Certainly Polynices has his doubts and fears about the consequences of meeting his brother in individual combat (*Theb.* 11.139–50) and is responsive to the entreaties of Adrastus (196f.) and Antigone (382–87). But Eteocles too shows doubt and delays from confronting his brother (268) until Tisiphone hurls him forth on to the battlefield (387–89).

that maximises death and suffering (11.648ff.). Underscores too other defining features of monarchal power in the poem—that of 'tyranny upon accession' and the failure of monarchs to learn from past experience. After the demise of Eteocles and accession of Creon to the throne, the new monarch assumes the mantle of tyranny in the manner of his predecessors:

> scandit fatale tyrannis
> Flebilis Aeoniae solium: pro blanda potestas
> Et sceptri malesuadus amor! numquamne priorum
> Haerebunt documenta nouis? iuuat ecce nefasto
> Stare loco regimenque manu tractare cruentum!
> Quid, melior Fortuna, potes! iam flectere patrem
> Incipit atque datis abolere Menoecea regnis.
> *Primum adeo saeuis imbutus moribus aulae*
> *(Indicium specimenque sui)* iubet igne supremo
> Arceri Danaos, nudoque sub axe relinqui
> Infelix bellum et tristes sine sedibus umbras.
> (*Theb.* 11.654–64; emphasis added)
> He ascends the throne of weeping Aonia,
> Fatal to tyrants. Ah, flattering power,
> And the ill-advised love of the sceptre! Will the lessons
> Of past monarchs never remain with new? Lo! It pleases him
> To stand in the cursed spot and to conduct a bloody reign!
> What powers you have, gracious Fortune! Enthroned he begins now
> To avert paternal feeling and to forget Menoeceus.
> *First, tainted with the cruel practices of the palace*
> *(As proof and sign of his reign)* he bids the Danaans be kept
> From the funeral fire, the unfortunate host be left
> Under the open sky, and their sad shades without an abode.

Assumption of monarchal power foredooms its possessor and disposes him to a lack of feeling and humanity. Both image-symbol and action attest. The sceptre, imagistic representation of manic, profane, seditious, internecine power (cf. 1.33–37), links Creon closely with previous Theban monarchs and aspirants such as Eteocles and Polynices (11.654; cf. 1.34). Creon's loss of affection for his son Menoeceus, whose death he perceives primarily in selfish terms (cf. 12.57–104, esp. 72–92), and especially his decree forbidding burial of the Argive corpses in defiance of natural law (12.94–102; cf. 11.662–64, 680), are acts that—despite the poet's stress on the causal agency of Pluto and Tisiphone (8.72–74; cf. 12.184–86; 590f.; 696f.)—are entirely consistent with the behaviour of a previous Theban monarch like Eteocles (cf. 3.96–98; 11.661–64, esp. 661f.; 680–81, esp. 681).

Creon's change in behaviour is attributable primarily to the inherent wickedness of Theban monarchy—11.661–64 (esp. 661f. italicised in the preceding paragraph) lays great stress on the cruelty that appears automatically to accompany the exercise of monarchal power—since prior to his accession he is generally portrayed in a favourable light, with the notable exception of his bitter denunciation of Eteocles, which betrays his power-lust and violent potentiality (269–96; cf. 300–02). Only just a short while before his accession he bitterly rebukes Eteocles for causing the deaths of many Thebans whose corpses had not yet received due rites of burial (276f.). Yet immediately upon taking power he refuses to extend the right of burial to Polynices and the Argive dead, an act that leads to further needless destruction and suffering for the inhabitants of Thebes. Just like his predecessors Creon fails to heed the lessons of the past. He and his kingdom are doomed to suffer the consequences. This failure to learn from the past recalls one of the important themes of the *Aeneid*. In Vergil's epic Aeneas fails to learn from past experience and becomes oblivious to the suffering that his quest for empire involves.[12]

When Creon banishes Oedipus from Thebes (11.669–72), the decrepit former monarch delivers a scathing attack upon the new monarch in the form of a *uituperatio regis* (677–707). Creon shows himself to be cast in the mould of the malevolent Oedipus. In fact, as Oedipus points out, Creon has only just become king, yet he wastes no time in following in his successors' footsteps by acting malevolently; his refusal to allow the proper burial of the Argive dead is reminiscent of similar impious deeds performed by his cruel predecessors:

'Iamne uacat saeuire, Creon? modo perfida regna
Fortunaeque locum nostrae, miserande, subisti,
Et tibi iam fas est regum calcare ruinas?
Iam tumulis uictos, socios iam moenibus arces?
Macte, potes digne Thebarum sceptra tueri:
Haec tua prima dies.'

(*Theb.* 11.677–82)

'Have you time already to be cruel, Creon? But late
Did you assume the treacherous throne and rank of my fortune,
Wretch, and already are allowed to tread on the ruins of kings?
Already do you bar the vanquished from their tombs, our comrades
From their walls? Bravo! You can guard worthily Thebes' sceptre!
This is your first day of rule.'

[12] Cf. Boyle (1986: 149ff.).

Oedipus demonstrates that Creon has assumed the mantle of tyranny in the usual fashion of Theban monarchs. The commonplaces revolve around the usual themes of the moral insensibility and contemptible nature of Theban monarchs. Oedipus stresses Creon's lack of courage, justice, temperance and wisdom, just as the anonymous Theban critic (1.186ff.) and Maeon (3.71ff.) do earlier in relation to Eteocles.

Banished from Thebes because of what Creon asserts is the Furies' inherent attraction to him (11.669–72; cf. 750–54)—an ironic claim indeed considering the rôle of Tisiphone in motivating Creon's burial interdict—Oedipus sarcastically asks the new monarch why he has so senselessly resorted to the timorous judgement of exile when a far harsher punishment is available (11.682–85): some liegeman would eagerly obey the monarch's command to decapitate him (685f.). While the reference to Creon's timidity recalls the faint-heartedness shown earlier by Eteocles (3.5f.), Oedipus' mention of the liegeman's eagerness to render physical violence recalls the preparedness of Eteocles' henchmen (79–81).

Oedipus knows that Creon will suffer a fate similar to that of previous Theban monarchs:

'habeas Thebana regasque
Moenia, quo Cadmus, quo Laius omine rexit
Quoque ego; sic thalamos, sic pignora fida capessas;
Nec tibi si uirtus Fortunam euadere dextra,
Sed lucem deprensus ames.'
(*Theb.* 11.701–05)

'Have the Theban city and rule it,
With the fortune that Cadmus, Laius, and I also governed.
Enter likewise into marriage and beget loyal sons;
Nor have the courage to escape Fortune with your hands,
But when overwhelmed, cling to life.'

Oedipus' blinding of himself is not only an act of self-retribution for his sins but symbolises the commencement of his new rôle as a blind prophet.[13] Physical blindness leads to prophetic awareness: just as Oedipus was able to divine that his sons would suffer for their sins, he is assured that Creon will endure a harsh punishment. The monarchs of Thebes are blind to the consequences of their wickedness, but the

[13] *Contra* Ahl (1986: 2901), who asserts that Oedipus' blinding of himself ensures that 'he will never see anything again'. As shown here, this is clearly not the case. Oedipus *sees* plenty after he is released from the grip of the Furies (e.g., *Theb.* 11.605ff., esp. 617–21; 677ff., esp. 701–05).

blind seer knows that no ruler's fate in Thebes is entirely his own. In the case of Creon this is especially true, given the supernatural motivation of his burial decree. Elsewhere the new monarch compares his sorrow over the death of Menoeceus to that experienced by Oedipus over the loss of Eteocles and Polynices (12.85–87). Creon is like Oedipus not only in his sorrow but in his vindictiveness. The servile flattery of Antigone (11.708–39) fails to move Creon sufficiently to change his decision to exile Oedipus (cf. 750–54) and thereby emphasises the monarch's lack of compassion, while the narrative concluding the scene lays stress on his arrogance (755f.). This interaction between speech and narrative helps to convey an overwhelming impression of monarchy as a corruptive and oppressive institution.

Figural Pillars of the Narrative: Adrastus and Theseus

The significance of Adrastus and Theseus in the *Thebaid* can be seen especially in terms of their structural placement in the narrative. The two monarchs are the figural pillars of the epic: the actions of the mostly pacific Theban monarch in book one balance those of the aggressive Athenian regent in book twelve. Adrastus is one of the most important figures. He appears as a prominent figure early in the first book (1.431ff.; cf. 390–400), delivers more speeches than any other character except Tydeus and speaks more lines than anyone save Hypsipyle.[14] Theseus does not appear until two-thirds of the way through the final book (12.519ff.), but his decisive and destructive rôle is an important one in the overall understanding of the poem. Theseus is the prominent figure in the second half of the final book (519–809) and he delivers four (590–98; 642–48; 771–73; 779–81) of the seven speeches in this section.[15] Adrastus similarly dominates the second half of the first book (1.312–720) and makes five (438–46; 468–73; 498–510; 557–672; 682–720) of the ten speeches in this segment.[16] Their positioning at opposite ends of the narrative portion of the text (1.45–12.809) and their respective fates bear considerable thematic significance. Attention is focused early in the poem on the

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[14] Adrastus makes 22 speeches (totalling 296 1/3 lines), Tydeus 24 speeches (186 1/3 lines); Hypsipyle's five speeches total 496 11/12 lines. For verification of these figures, see Dominik (1994: 315f., 320, 323f.).

[15] Evadne (*Theb.* 12.546–86) and Creon (689–92; 761–66) deliver the other speeches.

[16] The other speeches are made by Tydeus and Polynices (*Theb.* 1.448–50); Tydeus (452–65); Polynices (465; 676–81) and Coroebus (643–61: an inserted speech).

benevolence, piety and self-restraint of Adrastus (1.312–720; 2.367–720) and thereafter largely on his vain attempts to forestall violence against the will of the supernatural powers (e.g., 3.388–93, 440–49; cf. 4.38–41).[17] In contrast the Athenian monarch does not appear until close to the end of the poem (12.519ff.), but it is clear he represents a different type of ruler. The actions and speeches of both rulers play a critical rôle in defining their personalities and in creating the dramatic and thematic tensions inherent in the epic.

Like Adrastus, Theseus seems concerned with natural justice. But his treatment of women and violent undertaking of war against Thebes introduce a disturbing aspect into the notion of a just ruler. Associations and comparisons of Theseus with female barbarians (e.g., 12.535–39, esp. 538f.), cruel monarchs (e.g., 8.53f.), fierce warriors (cf. 12.736f.; 8.583ff., esp. 587–93), malevolent divinities (e.g., 12.733–36) and ferocious beasts (e.g., 12.601–05) suggest that his just war against Thebes is not all it appears to be on the surface. The peace-loving Adrastus survives the great war but he does so as a broken, embittered, impotent leader, while his militaristic Athenian counterpart reigns supreme in his destructive venture against Thebes. A generally non-violent ruler such as Adrastus appears to carry little weight with his people or the higher powers; conversely the violent actions of a ruler such as Theseus meet with the approval of the gods largely because of their destructive element, although they are directed ostensibly toward the fulfilment of a just cause (cf. 12.711–14). In the end the concentration in the narrative upon the negative consequences of a seemingly just war—as shown in the pathetic plight of the victims (730–51) and the suffering of the survivors (797–809)—serves to undermine considerably not only the ideal of such a war but also the surface portrayal of Theseus as a truly just king. Hence the importance of the twelfth book featuring the war undertaken by Theseus, the scenes of mourning, and the heroism of Argia and Antigone cannot be underestimated in terms of its contribution to the thematic design of the *Thebaid*.[18]

The portrayal of Theseus is more complex than the presentation

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[17] Adrastus is certainly not, as Aricò (1972: 131) and Vessey (1973: 98) assert, a Stoic sage. On the subject of Adrastus' Stoic bent, Ahl (1974: 143; 1986: 2810) well notes the inconsistency in Vessey's treatment of Adrastus. Vessey (1973: 98) maintains Adrastus is a Stoic sage, yet describes him (1973: 315f.) as a powerless and ineffectual monarch who lacks the nobility and equanimity of Theseus. As Ahl (1974: 143) observes, Adrastus is scarcely a Stoic sage if he possesses these defects in character.

[18] Some critics fail to recognise the significance and relevance of this final book to the rest of the epic; see, for instance, Moore (1921: 108).

of his Argive and Theban counterparts. Numerous references in the text undercut the superficial presentation of the Athenian monarch as an exemplar of justice and clemency.[19] This is particularly the case in his dealings with women in the epic, many of whom are represented as models of heroic virtue despite their physical weakness and helplessness. Pluto tells of the aid that Theseus gives Pirithous in his friend's attempted rape of Proserpina (8.53f.). There is mention of Ariadne, who assists Theseus in slaying the Minotaur in return for the promise of marriage and then is abandoned by the monarch for her sister Phaedra (12.676). When Theseus returns to Athens after the subjugation of the Amazons, the citizens are astonished that he should deign to take a barbarian bride and she should bear him a son (535–39, 635–38). The references to the future progeny of Hippolyte (538f., 635–38) are a reminder that Theseus, like Oedipus, will adjudge he has been wronged, will curse his offspring who will endure a tragic death, and will suffer banishment (cf. Plut. *Thes.*), an indication that the cycle of mythical history will repeat itself. Faced with a similar problem as Oedipus, Theseus reacts in a way similar to the former Theban monarch.[20]

This analogy between the two figures is strengthened in an indirect reference to Theseus' accession:

> Linquitur Eois longe speculabile proris
> Sunion, unde uagi casurum in nomina ponti
> Cresia decepit falso ratis Aegea uelo.
> (*Theb.* 12.624–26)
> Sunion, seen far from Eastern prows, is left behind,
> Whence the Cretan bark by its lying canvas deceived Aegeus,
> Who fell and gave the capricious sea its name.

Like Oedipus, then, Theseus is the cause of his father's death. When the Athenian returns from slaying the Minotaur, he neglects to hoist the white sail for the black, a signal which was to herald to Aegeus the success of his mission; his father promptly jumps into the sea, thereafter called the Aegean after him. The final line of this brief passage (626) translates, 'The Cretan bark by its *lying* canvas *deceived*

[19] Cf. Ahl (1982: 935): 'Statius studiedly balances Theseus' chivalry toward the Argive women with reminders of the shameful treatment he has accorded others, particularly the Amazons. We must not, then, exaggerate Theseus' stature in the *Thebaid*. Quite apart from his treatment of women, his other credentials as a moral hero in the epic are hardly solid'.
[20] Cf. Ahl (1986: 2896).

Aegeus' (my emphasis), strongly hinting that Theseus' failure to change the sails was intentional.[21]

The Athenian monarch is *Neptunius* (588, 665) and therefore associated with a god whose brothers are cruel and unjust deities. Theseus is solely responsible for his destructive venture against Thebes, which is fully sanctioned by the destructive Minerva, patron goddess of Athens (cf. 606–10). The comparisons between Theseus and the cruel deities Jupiter (649–55) and Mars (733–36) further link the Athenian monarch closely with the malevolent and destructive gods. The former comparison likens the aggressive manner of Theseus' departure to the violent oncoming of winter effected by Jupiter, suggesting that the human rôle of the monarch corresponds to the divine rôle of the cosmocrator in its disagreeable aspects.[22] Jupiter and his human counterpart are harsh and unremitting in their manner and they encourage the perpetration of violence—with the inevitable consequences of human suffering that result—in executing their plans. The close link between the malevolent supernatural powers and the battle-hungry Theseus is evidenced especially in the preparation of the war-goddess Minerva, her brandishing of the Gorgon Medusa, and gaze of the monster's serpents toward Thebes (606–09). References to Minerva and the decapitated Medusa and her serpents anticipate the fate of Thebes in the coming battle (cf. 609f.).

Animal and weapon imagery too undermines the surface presentation of Theseus as a just and benevolent king. The fabric of the narrative in the second half of book twelve is interwoven with such symbolic images as monsters, serpents, bulls, lions, shields and spears. These images interact with other images elsewhere in the *Thebaid* to impart and derive meaning. As instanced by the image-symbol of the bull. Theseus is compared to a conquering bull who willingly defends his brides and pasture despite the wounds he has endured in a recent struggle with another challenger (601–05). Taurine similes are used in earlier passages to describe the actions of the brutal Tydeus (e.g., 3.330–35), ruthless Eteocles (e.g., 11.251–66) and power-starved Polynices (e.g., 2.323–30; 9.82–85); therefore the use of a taurine simile to describe

[21] Ahl (1986: 2896; 1989: 5); cf. Ahl (1982: 935): 'We know Oedipus' act [of slaying his father] was unintentional; with Theseus' we cannot be sure'.

[22] Cf. Newman (1975: 84) and Burgess (1978: 356ff., 549f. n. 26). *Contra* Vessey (1973: 314f.), who contends that the Athenian king, 'in his impartial devotion to justice and to law, is an earthly reflection of the supreme god'.

the conduct of the Athenian monarch associates him unfavourably with these figures. This comparison of Theseus with a bull assumes additional significance when a little later his shield depicts him in his traditional rôle as the slayer of the Minotaur (12.665–71). The bull slayer acts like a bull himself in his eagerness for battle,[23] suggesting that Theseus is attracted as much by the prospect of fighting with Creon as he is interested in upholding natural law.

Even though Theseus has only just returned from subduing the Amazons, a curious warlike race of women (12.519ff.), he shows an eagerness for war (595) and is strangely unmindful of its hardships (599). The enthusiasm of Theseus for war and his oblivion to its hardship seems not to reflect simply the extent of his support for the justice of the women's cause.[24] Indeed there is something troubling about his avidity for war. In Euripides' *Supplices* the Athenian monarch decides to take up arms against Thebes only after Creon refuses through an insolent messenger to reverse his decree banning the burial of the Argive corpses (399ff.). Theseus shows no such deliberation in the *Thebaid* and, unlike Adrastus earlier (3.388–93, 440–49; 4.38–41), gives no thought to the destructive consequences of its undertaking.[25] As the Athenians set out for Thebes, Theseus violently hurls his spear forward and is likened to Jupiter who ushers in severe winter (12.649–55). The imposing figure of the bloodstained leader with his shield depicting his gory slaying of the Minotaur inspires fear in the enemy as he goes into battle (665–75, esp. 672–74). Theseus' mien and weapons define the monarch and betray his real intent of destruction.

The contrast in objectives between the embassies of Phegeus and Tydeus further points up the destructive intentions of Theseus. Phegeus arrives in Thebes supposedly on a mission of peace (12.681ff.), recalling the mission of Tydeus to Thebes (2.389ff.).[26] His outward appearance is peaceful enough but he angrily threatens war and informs Creon that Theseus will soon arrive with his troops in Thebes (12.681–86). Like Tydeus, Phegeus carries the olive branch proclaiming peace and turns on the reigning monarch when he gains admittance to the court. There the similarity between the scenes ends. The address of Tydeus to Eteocles is sorely lacking in basic diplomacy, but he does not threaten

[23] Cf. Ahl (1986: 2895).
[24] *Contra* Ahl (1966: 61 n. 16).
[25] Vessey (1970a: 49; 1973: 308) interprets Theseus' lack of hesitation in marching against Thebes purely as a means of glorifying the Athenian monarch.
[26] Cf. Vessey (1973: 130).

war against Thebes. Notwithstanding his aggressive stance, the approach of Tydeus appears to be a sincere attempt on the part of the Argives to forestall the great war: hostilities are not immediately decided upon even when the Argive overture is rejected (cf. 3.390). Conversely, the mission of Phegeus obviously is not designed to achieve peace: the Athenian army departs for Thebes even before sending the envoy to the city with that supposed aim.

Theseus on the surface seems far superior to any of the Seven and supremely confident in his own powers.[27] Vessey characterises him as the divine agent of *Clementia* ('Clemency') and Zimmerman describes him as a figure of *pietas* ('piety').[28] But when the battle commences he is portrayed in terms similar to the descriptions of Tydeus and other chief warriors among the Seven whose indomitable nature and fearlessness are highlighted in the main battle narrative (7–11). The menacing shadow of his spear falls upon the ranks of the enemy and his spear-point projects light on to the field of battle (12.730–32). His destructive propensity is highlighted in a comparison with the war-god Mars whose brutal conduct he mirrors in battle (733–36).[29] The combined effect of this comparison, the sinister implications of which are manifest, and the earlier one with Jupiter (649–55) serves to associate the violent actions of this human ruler with the wanton destructiveness of his divine counterparts.[30]

The contempt of Theseus for the common soldiery of Thebes and his refusal to engage in their slaughter (736f.) recall the brutal Tydeus, whose pride prevents him from plundering the youthful Atys and compels him to express a preference for more worthy victims (8.587–91; cf. 583–85, 592f.). Animal imagery—specifically a leonine simile (12.740; cf. 8.593–96)—strengthens the connexion between the two heroes. The comparison serves much the same purpose as those stressing the similarity between the conduct of Theseus and behaviour of a battle-worn bull (12.601–05), harsh Jupiter (649–55) and savage Mars (733–36): the violent and destructive actions of Theseus resemble in some degree the irrationality and inhumanity of Tydeus. Theseus'

[27] Cf. Ahl (1966: 59), who asserts Theseus' superiority in comparison with the Seven.

[28] Vessey (1992: xli), Zimmerman (1993: 263f.).

[29] Vessey (1973: 315) notes this comparison but does not comment on its rather sinister implications.

[30] Theseus does assume a godlike rôle, but in the opposite of the Christian sense that Moreland (1975: 30 n. 12) suggests.

expression of disdain for taking easy victims is proven false when he strikes down seven warriors in quick succession with considerable ease, barely missing another with his spear (741–51). When the Athenian monarch confronts Creon, he quickly slays his Theban counterpart without showing even a trace of mercy (768–81). Zimmerman asserts that his purpose of ensuring the burial of the Argive corpses justifies the violent means of its attainment.[31] Perhaps it does (cf. 711–14, esp. 714), but his conduct compares unfavourably with the behaviour of Vergil's Aeneas, who at least pauses briefly and gives some thought to sparing Turnus before dispatching him in a blind rage (*Aen.* 12.928–52, esp. 946f., 951).

Despite the generally favourable portrait of Adrastus and the ambiguous presentation of Theseus, the picture of monarchy that emerges from the *Thebaid* is predominantly negative. This impression is based mostly upon the conduct of Eteocles and Creon with occasional references to actions of previous monarchs such as Oedipus and Laius. Brief mention of criminal deeds by other monarchs such as Crotopus and Lycurgus in the digressive episodes and Busiris and Tereus in the main narrative reinforces this negative portrayal. A cruel and oppressive institution, monarchy inflicts widespread and longstanding suffering upon subjects who are largely innocent of any wrongdoing. And what about those who bravely raise their voices against such tyranny? To this question the *Thebaid*'s answer is equally manifest: for the protests of subjects such as the anonymous Theban (1.173–96, esp. 186–88), Maeon (3.59–77, 83–87, esp. 71–77) and Aletes (206–09; cf. 214f.) ultimately prove futile in terms of improving their lot and achieving a just and benevolent rule.

[31] Zimmerman (1993: 259).

CHAPTER THREE

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ABUSE OF POWER

I hate that drum's discordant sound
Parading round and round and round:
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns, and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widows' tears, and orphans' moans;
And all that misery's hand bestows
To fill the catalogue of human woes.

John Scott, *Ode on Hearing the Drum*

—Yet tears to human suffering are due;
And mortal hopes defeated and o'erthrown
Are mourned by man. . . .

William Wordsworth, *Laodamia* 164–66

The *Thebaid* is a compelling statement of the horrifying consequences of the imprudent pursuit and exercise of power. Its opening words—*fraternas acies* ('fraternal strife')—allude to what is to Statius the worst kind of human violence: that which is directed against one's own flesh and blood. The ultimate word of the narrative proper—*luctus* ('sorrow', 12.796)—reveals its final consequence. Between these two points of the epic the poet creates a vivid picture of the horrors of human warfare and violence. Statius is concerned in the *Thebaid* not just with civil war but with war and its consequences *in general*; his interests extend beyond the narrow parameters of localised conflict. The mass destruction and suffering caused by the fighting that takes place in the poem is evidence of the futility of war, since virtually no one escapes from its devastating effects and little seems to be achieved. Jupiter's stated purpose in instigating the conflict between the Thebans and Argives is the destruction of both races (1.241–47; cf. 1.224–26; 3.244–52) and almost every major incident of the poem works toward this end. Statius places great emphasis on the horrific aspects of war and violence through his graphic descriptions of the fighting that occurs in the poem, particularly in books 7–11. The weakness and helplessness of man in the face of overwhelming supernatural opposition is epitomised by the countless tragic deaths and immense

human suffering that occur in the poem.[1] The depressing *Weltanschauung* of the *Thebaid* is also based partly on what the poet perceives as the limited capacity of man to understand the nature of the human condition, particularly his position in relation to the higher powers.

War and Violence: Their Destructiveness and Futility

Numerous passages in the battle narrative are filled with a compelling realism betraying the horrors of war. At the outbreak of the war the scene is one of mass disorder, intense emotion and desperate urgency:

saeuus iam clamor et irae
Hinc atque inde calent; nullo uenit ordine bellum,
Confusique duces uulgo, et neglecta regentum
Imperia; una equites mixti peditumque cateruae
Et rapidi currus; premit indigesta ruentes
Copia, nec sese uacat ostentare nec hostem
Noscere.
(*Theb.* 7.615–21)

Now there is a wild uproar, and anger
Flares on this side and that. The war comes in no order; the chiefs
Are mixed up with the soldiers; and the commands of the leaders
Are ignored. Horsemen, hordes of foot-soldiers, and swift chariots
Are locked together; a disordered mass presses upon
The onrushers; nor is there time to show oneself or
To inspect the foe.

From the beginning of the conflict Statius is intent upon stressing its devastating effects upon the soldiery of both sides. The opening scene depicting the commencement of hostilities is especially effective in portraying this waste of human life (632ff.). A number of warriors are quickly mowed down with a variety of weapons:

Certat opus ferri: sternunt alterna furentes
Hippomedon Sybarin, Pylium Periphanta Menoeceus,
Parthenopaeus Ityn: Sybaris iacet ense cruento,
Cuspide trux Periphas, Itys insidiante sagitta.
Caeneos Inachii ferro Mauortius Haemon
Colla rapit, cui diuiduum trans corpus hiantes
Truncum oculi quaerunt, animus caput; arma iacentis

[1] Nonetheless, Erren (1970: 88–95) manages to detect an element of *zierlicher Schauder* in the *Thebaid*.

Iam rapiebat Abas: cornu deprensus Achiua
Dimisit moriens clipeum hostilemque suumque.
(*Theb.* 7.640–48; cf. 632–39)
They strive with the sword. In fierce interchange Hippomedon
Strikes down Sybaris, Menoeceus Pylian Periphas,
Parthenopaeus Itys: Sybaris is slain by the
Bloody sword, grim Periphas by the spear-point, Itys by a
Treacherous arrow. Mavortian Haemus severs with his sword
The neck of Inachian Caeneus, whose wide-open eyes search
For his trunk across the riven body, his spirit the head.
Abas already was stripping the fallen's arms when, pierced by
An Achaean lance, he dropped in death his foe's shield and his own.

This bizarre description immediately confirms the terrible reality of the war that has just begun.

At the commencement of the second battle, the chief engagement of the war, the armies present a splendid sight with their plumes, riders on their horses, chariots, shining armour and weapons as yet unstained with the blood of battle (8.395ff., esp. 402–05). Yet this magnificent pageantry quickly degenerates into a scene of total destruction as the battlefield becomes a slaughterhouse of innominate human corpses from both sides:

Exclusere diem telis, stant ferrea caelo
Nubila, nec iaculis artatus sufficit aer.
Hi pereunt missis, illi redeuntibus hastis,
Concurrunt per inane sudes et mutua perdunt
Vulnera, concurrunt hastae, stridentia funda
Saxa pluunt, uolucres imitantur fulgura glandes
Et formidandae non una morte sagittae.
Nec locus ad terram telis: in corpora ferrum
Omne cadit; saepe ignari perimuntque caduntque.
(*Theb.* 8.412–20)
They shut out the day with spears; clouds of iron stand in the sky;
Nor does the crowded air have enough space for the javelins.
Some die by hurled spears, others by spears flung back.
Stakes meet in the void and squander the wounds they convey.
Spears meet; stones rain hissing from their slings; swift bullets
And dread arrows not for just one death emulate lightning-strokes.
There is no spot for earthbound missiles: every shaft falls
On a body. Often they slay and fall unaware in death.

The magnificence of the spectacle when the armies line up for battle is belied by the horrific consequences of what happens when the actual conflict begins. The anonymity of the victims depersonalises the conflict and actually increases the sense of the indiscriminate loss of human

life, since every warrior appears to be susceptible to the deadly consequences of martial violence. Statius narrows the focus of his presentation of the general devastation of war and its victims to the purely personal level by following up this description with a similar passage depicting the manner and quickness of death that afflicts a number of warriors whose names are specified (438–47).

The illusion of war as a magnificent spectacle is shattered completely in the interval (9.252–83) between the two segments that comprise Hippomedon's *aristeia* (196–251, 284–314). The plumage, glittering armour and weapons that earlier formed such an impressive sight just prior to battle (8.402–05) are now scattered over the surface of the river along with the corpses of the men who bore them:

> Iam laceri pronis uoluuntur cursibus artus
> Oraque et abscisae redeunt in pectora dextrae,
> Spicula iam clipeosque leues arcusque remissos
> Vnda uehit, galeasque uetant descendere cristae:
> Summa uagis late sternuntur flumina telis
> Ima uiris: illic luctantur corpora leto,
> Efflantesque animas retro premit obuius amnis.
> (*Theb.* 9.259–65; cf. 252–258, 266–83)
> Now mangled limbs roll down the fast-moving stream,
> And heads and cloven arms reconnect to their trunks.
> Now the wave bears spears and light shields and slackened bows;
> And plumes prevent their helmets from submerging.
> The surface of the stream is strewn widely with drifting weapons,
> Its depths with men; there bodies grapple with death,
> And the opposing stream chokes back their departing souls.

Statius seems to be suggesting that what happens on the battlefield is far from admirable: war is not a pageant but has a definite reality in terms of its human cost.

This is evidenced especially in the appearance of the youthful Atys, Crenaeus and Parthenopaeus just prior to their deaths on the battlefield. Atys (8.564–69, esp. 569) and Crenaeus (9.319–33, esp. 319–25) are misled by the superficial glamour of war and foolishly take to the battlefield untrained in the art of combat. The description of Parthenopaeus just prior to his brief *aristeia* (9.683ff.) reveals that he too is uninformed about the true horrors of war. He shows a boyish enthusiasm for slaughter (683) and fascination with his splendid accoutrements and clangorous weapons (683–99, esp. 694–99). The intoxication of these *Heldenknaben* with the imagined glory of war and their ignorance concerning its real dangers leads directly to their

untimely ends. In no sense can their tragic deaths be said to have achieved anything remotely positive. This complete waste of human life bears testimony to the total futility of war.

Later as the warriors leave the field at the end of the day's fighting the scene is one of bloodshed and unmitigated gloom and despair (10.1ff.). The field is strewn with the bloodstained corpses of the warriors; the ragged survivors leave behind their arms and even the horses on which they had so proudly entered the fray (10.5–11; cf. 8.402–05). Ironically the one source of comfort for either side is gained through the deaths of four Argive chieftains, which provide some encouragement to the Thebans (10.11f.). Again the utter futility of the war and the complete waste of human life is highlighted. There has been no gain to either side and the only consolation that can be found is in death itself.

The fighting in the third and last battle of the war takes place at the gates of Thebes and is portrayed in similarly graphic terms (10.493ff.). As in the first battle when they attack fiercely (7.615ff.) and later make a hasty retreat (8.153ff.), the Argives experience a sudden change of fortune when they boldly attack Thebes (10.474ff.) and then flee in complete disarray (11.21ff.). The fate of the Argive army in both battles parallels the fate of the foremost warriors among the Seven, who experience initial success in battle but then suffer a tragic reversal in their fortunes and endure a violent death. In describing the gory fighting that takes place in this final battle, the poet selects his details carefully and moulds his images into a vivid portrayal of the grosser aspects of death. Bizarre, picturesque elements predominate, as in the brief but detailed description of the death of Amyntor:

> . . . et pronas tendentis Amyntoris ulnas
> Fundentisque preces penitus ceruice remissa
> Verba solo uoltusque cadunt, colloque decorus
> Torquis in hostiles cecidit per uulnus harenas.
> (*Theb.* 10.515–18)
>
> . . . as Amyntor implores with outstretched arms
> And pours out prayers, his neck is cleanly severed
> And his words and face fall to the ground; a comely necklace
> Also slides over the wound on his neck to the hostile earth.

Another description of death focuses on the demise of Antheus and is remarkable for its violent conception and the way that the poet brings forth a succession of images to produce a grotesque effect:

Anthea falcato lustrantem moenia curru
Desuper Ogygiae pepulit grauis impetus hastae;
Lora excussa manu, retroque in terga uolutus
Semianimos artus ocreis retinentibus haeret;
Mirandum uisu belli scelus: arma trahuntur,
Fumantesque rotae tellurem et tertius hastae
Sulcus arat; longo sequitur uaga puluere ceruix,
Et resupinarum patet orbita lata comarum.
(*Theb.* 10.544–51)

The brute force of an Ogygian spear strikes Antheus
From above as he drives his scythed chariot around the walls.
The reigns are ripped from his hands; half-alive, he falls behind
Upon his back and his body hangs fast by his greaves.
War's misfortune is strange to behold: the arms are dragged along;
The smoking wheels plough the earth; and the spear makes a third furrow;
The head pitching side to side follows in a long trail of dust;
And the expanse of trailing hair yields a clear track.

This descriptive effect is illustrative of Statius' tendency to elaborate on the specific features of war and is conducive to the thematic purpose of portraying the bizarre aspects of violence.

Most of these scenes of general destruction appear in successive books just prior to or after the commencement of the main *aristeiai* of the Seven, notably Amphiaraus (scene of general devastation: 7.632–48; *aristeia*: 711ff.), Tydeus (scene: 8.414–20, 438–47; *aristeia*: 465ff.), Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus (scene: 9.252–83; *aristeiai*: 196ff., 744ff.) and Capaneus (scene: 10.262–325; mini-*aristeia*: 738ff.),[2] preparing the way for the individual portraits of these figures around which the battle narrative is framed. The *topoi* comprising the typical pattern of the Statian *aristeia* are particularly effective in emphasising the widespread devastation and futility of war in general and particular terms. Naturally the emphasis in the *aristeiai* of these heroes is on the slaughterous aspect of the fighting. A prominent feature of these heroic displays of valour in battle is the *androktasia*, a catalogue of the hero's victims or brief description of the slaughter. There are two lists of victims in each of the *aristeiai* of Amphiaraus (7.711–22, 755–59), Tydeus (8.475–78, 696–701) and Hippomedon (9.289–93, 304–06), while the sole catalogue of Parthenopaeus' slayings is the longest

[2] Schetter (1960: 109) observes that the high points of the battles are patterned on the traditional Homeric *Patrokleia*: victorious rise of the hero, then peripety and death.

and most elaborate (9.745–69). The occasional references to the home and family of the deceased enhance the feeling generated by the mass slayings of the senselessness of the war (e.g., 7.718–22, 767–69).

The first list of slayings in the battle narrative is typical of the *androktasia* and comprises the names of ten warriors who are cut down by Amphiaraus in quick succession by a variety of means:

iaculo Phlegyan iaculoque superbum
Phylea, falcato Clonin et Chremetaona curru
Comminus hunc stantem metit, hunc a poplite sectum,
Cuspide non missa Chromin Iphinoumque Sagenque
Intonsumque Gyan sacrumque Lycorea Phoebo
(Inuitus: iam fraxineum demiserat hastae
Robur, et excussis apparuit infula cristis),
Alcathoum saxo, cui circum stagna Carysti
Et domus et coniunx et amantes litora nati.
Vixerat ille diu pauper scrutator aquarum,
Decepit tellus, moriens hiemesque Notosque
Laudat et experti meliora pericula ponti.
(*Theb.* 7.711–22)

With a javelin he drops Phlegyas and proud Phyleus;
With scythed chariot he mows down Clonis and Chremetaon,
One confronting him, the other severed at the knee;
With thrusting spear Chromis, Iphinous, Sages,
And unshorn Gyas and Lycoreus sacred to Phoebus
(Remorsefully: already he had plunged full the ashen strength
Of the spear when he spied a fillet in the dislodged plumes);
With a stone Alcathous, whose home was by the seas
Of Carystus with his wife and children who loved its shores.
For a long time he had lived a poor searcher of the waters;
Land deceived him, and dying he praises the storms and winds
And the more agreeable dangers of the sea he knew.

This pathetic vignette, with the rapid succession of deaths and the different weapons employed in the slayings, underlines the purely destructive nature of war. The concentration of the poet on the gruesome aspects of war is typified in the lines concluding the graphic description of Amphiaraus' massacre, gory in detail:

Et iam cornipedes trepidi ac moribunda reflantes
Corpora rimantur terras, omnisque per artus
Sulcus et incisis altum rubet orbita membris.
Hos iam ignorantes terit impius axis, at illi
Vulnere semineces (nec deuitare facultas)
Venturum super ora uident; iam lubrica tabo
Frena, nec insisti madidus dat temo, rotaeque

Sanguine difficiles, et tardior ungula fossis
Visceribus: tunc ipse furens in morte relicta
Spicula et e mediis extantes ossibus hastas
Auellit, strident animae currumque sequuntur.
(*Theb.* 7.760–70)

And now the horn-footed steeds snort in agitation at the
Dying bodies and probe the earth. Every track passes over
Bodies and every wheel-rut becomes deep-red with severed limbs.
The unholy axle grinds some unconscious, but others
Half-dead from wounds see it (nor have the power to avoid it)
Bearing down on them. Already the reins are slimy with gore;
The slippery chariot provides no road-grip; wheels
Are clogged with blood; and trodden viscera slow the horses' hooves.
Then in a rage he rips out spears abandoned in the dead
And spears protruding from the middle of corpses;
Spirits shriek and chase after the chariot.

The terrors of war are well illustrated in the vivid description of Menoeceus' mass slaying of his opponents on the battlefield and the bloodstained image of the grisly Sphinx that seems to come to life on his helmet:

exanimes circum cumulantur acerui;
Omne sedet telum, nulli sine caedibus ictus.
. . . non mens, non dextra quiescit.
Non auida arma uacant, ipsa insanire uidetur
Sphinx galeae custos, uisoque animata cruore
Emicat effigies et sparsa orichalca renident.
(*Theb.* 10.655–60)

About him heaps of dead are piled;
Every missile hits its mark; no blow is without a victim.
. . . neither mind nor hand is at rest;
The greedy weapons are never idle. The Sphinx, guardian
Of his helmet, seems to rage; the image, animated by
The sight of blood, springs forth, and the spattered brass beams.

The foregoing passages not only portray directly the horrors of war but also bear testimony to its utter futility, since nothing is really achieved by this senseless destruction and waste of human life except the promotion of bloodshed and suffering. The *androktasiai* of Amphiaraus (7.711–22, 755–59) and Menoeceus (10.655–58) are quickly followed by their own deaths (7.818–23; 10.774–79, respectively). In the case of Menoeceus, whose act of self-destruction is intended to gain victory for Thebes (cf. 10.613f.), his death is especially futile since it does nothing to save the city from ultimate defeat (cf. 12.696).

The futility of violence and human strength is nowhere better seen than in the fates of Tydeus (*androktasia*: 8.475–78, 696–701; death: cf. 9.18f., 25–27), Hippomedon (*androktasia*: 9.289–93, 304–06; death: 528–32), Parthenopaeus (*androktasia*: 9.745–75; death: cf. 877–907, esp. 885) and Capaneus (*androktasia*: 10.743–47; death: 935–38), whose deaths—like those of Amphiaraus and Menoeceus—follow almost immediately in the wake of their own *androktasiai*. Statius creates the greatest possible dramatic effect by arranging the death of each hero in a rising tide of violence and horror on the battlefield; appropriately, the final, most gruesome deaths, which follow the last scene of general combat between the Argive and Theban armies (11.21–56), are reserved for Eteocles and Polynices (403ff.). In most cases the imminence of their deaths is made clear in the battle narrative (7.690–93; 9.258, 570ff.; 10.831ff.). Although the poet lays special stress upon the *androktasiai* and subsequent deaths of these heroes, there are some passages where the slaughterous activity of less prominent warriors is followed instantly by their own deaths. This is evident especially in the scene of general devastation preceding the *ankdroktasia* and death of Hippomedon when each of three warriors is cut down in quick succession after slaying an opponent (9.252). Other occasions on which warriors are slain immediately after felling an opponent occur in 9.566–69, 674–76 (Greeks and Thebans), 867–75 (Dryas).

The most horrific example of the devastating consequences of violence in the entire poem occurs during the nocturnal raid of the Argives upon the Theban warriors who encircle their camp (10.262ff.). At the urging of Adrastus (266–68; cf. 236–44) and Amphiaraus (269–71), the Argives brutally slaughter the Thebans (271–325) who have been placed under a heavy sleep (137–55) at the instigation of Juno (79–82). The description of the horrible massacre is painted in the most graphic terms:

stagnant nigrantia tabo
Gramina, sanguineis nutant tentoria riuis;
Fumat humus, somnique et mortis anhelitus una
Voluitur.

(*Theb.* 10.298–301)

The grass is stagnant black
With gore; the tents totter in streams of blood; the ground reeks;
And the breathing of sleep mingles with the gasps
Of death.

This horrifying picture of bloodshed culminates in the mixture of wine and blood that overflows the scene:

Proturbat mensas dirus liquor: undique manant
Sanguine permixti latices et Bacchus in altos
Crateras paterasque redit.
(*Theb.* 10.311–13)
The dread torrent engulfs the tables. Everywhere liquor
Mixes with blood and the wine returns to the deep
Mixing-bowls and the drinking cups.

madida ora redundant
Accensusque mero sopor aestuat; ecce iacentis
Inachius uates iugulum fodit, expulit ingens
Vina cruor fractumque perit in sanguine murmur.
(*Theb.* 10.320–23)
His mouth overflows with wine
And his sleep, inflamed with wine, becomes disturbed. See,
The Inachian prophet stabs his throat as he lies; a strong spurt
Of blood expels the wine and his murmurs perish in the flow.

It is difficult to imagine a more telling portrayal of the destructiveness and gruesome horrors of violence, yet typically the slaughter achieves nothing in the long term, despite the subsequent Argive rout of the Theban troops (11.21ff.).

The supreme illustration of the ultimate futility of war—and of the insatiable lust for power—is the duel between Eteocles and Polynices, fittingly the culminating episode of the war. As the brothers meet on the battlefield, the basic nature of armed combat between two antagonists is epitomised:

miscentur frena manusque
Telaque, et ad terram turbatis gressibus ambo
Praecipitant.
(*Theb.* 11.518–20)
Reins, arms and weapons are thrown
Into confusion; their horses lose their step and both are hurled
To earth.

coeunt sine more, sine arte,
Tantum animis iraque, atque ignescentia cernunt
Per galeas odia et uultus rimantur acerbo
Lumine: nil adeo mediae telluris, et enses
Impliciti innexaeque manus, alternaque saeui
Murmura ceu lituos rapiunt aut signa tubarum.
(*Theb.* 11.524–29)

They engage without skill or method,
Only in pride and anger; they discern hatred blazing
Through their helmets and search for each other's face
With fierce gaze. No stretch of earth separates them;
Swords clash; arms entangle; and as they rage they catch the other's
Shouts as if they were the blares of horns or trumpets.

This scene of confusion and the hatred and fury of the brothers recalls the atmosphere of the fighting at the outbreak of the war (cf. 7.615–21). The duel also serves as index of war's lack of finality. For the war has not resolved which brother is to rule Thebes, so their meeting would appear to decide the issue once and for all. The result of the duel is determinant and determinate in that the brothers are slain and the throne is left to Creon.[3] But the duel is also *in*determinate in the sense that abuse of power by the newly crowned head of state causes further needless death and suffering for the citizens through the occurrence of another war.

What of the brief war that Theseus instigates against Creon (12.588ff.)? This war ensures the burial of the Argive corpses and seems entirely justified, but Statius is intent upon stressing its destructivity. The impression conveyed early is that the ensuing conflict is to entail destruction of a similar magnitude if not duration to the war between Thebes and Argos (12.606–10; cf. 8.344–49). The manner and appearance of the departing Athenians are ominous: the militaristic pose of the Jupiter-like Theseus strikes the enemy with fear, while the troops have a deleterious impact upon the landscape and their armour and weapons generate a plutonic effect (12.649–74). The entire war episode shows the complete dominance of the Athenians and abject helplessness of the Thebans. Animal images represent the behaviour of the Athenian army and their leader: the troops sate their rage in common slaughter and are compared unfavourably to dogs and degenerate wolves who rejoice in timid prey, while anger feeds Theseus, giving him leonine strength to slay greater prey (739f.). The primary focus is on the purely destructive aspects of the battle rather than on the justice of the Athenian cause. Statius seems not to question the validity of this cause, only the destructive means of its attainment.

Snijder argues that Statius raises war to a higher standing in his description of Theseus' war against Argos.[4] The destructive exploits

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[3] *Contra* Ahl (1986: 2885): 'The issue of kingship remains unresolved'.
[4] Snijder (1968: 18).

of Theseus and his army appear to be vindicated insofar as they ensure the Argive burial. But there is nothing glorious about the *manner* in which the Athenian army attacks and slaughters the defenceless Thebans. Despite the apparent justice of Theseus' cause, the basic nature of war itself does not change: the tragic consequences of martial violence are death and suffering. Significantly the poet does not conclude the epic on a note of joyous celebration but ends rather with a scene of mourning depicting the intense grief and sorrow of survivors (12.797–807), thus drawing the attention of his audience one last time to the ultimate futility of human violence and bloodshed.

Of course it is not only in the battle narrative that the destructiveness of war is apparent. A few episodes preceding the great war attest to the horror of violence and its devastating consequences. One of the major incidents evolves around Tydeus' mass slaying of the ambush party sent against him by Eteocles (2.529ff.). The scene is one of unrestrained violence and indiscriminate slaughter in which Tydeus easily cuts down his opponents, as in his brief confrontation with four of the warriors:

> rotat ipse furentem
> Deilochum, comitemque illi iubet ire sub umbras
> Phegea sublata minitantem bella securi
> Dircaeumque Gyan et Echionium Lycophontem.
> (*Theb.* 2.607–10)

> He whirled headlong the raging
> Deilochus and bids Phegeus, threatening with upraised axe,
> To go with him as companion beneath the shades, also
> Dircean Gyas and Echionian Lycophontes.

In effect the entire narrative of the clash takes the form of an extended *androktasia* describing the manner in which the numerous victims of Tydeus meet their tragic deaths.[5]

The digressive episodes too portray the horror of violence and its miseries. The Coroebus tale (1.557ff.) features the rape of a defenceless virgin (571–75), the gruesome details of her baby's death (587–90), and a monster's brutal slaughter of defenceless children (600–04). But it is mainly in the Hypsipyle narrative (5.28ff.) that the devastating and widespread effects of violence are apparent. The slaughter of the dormant Lemnian men and children by their wives is one of the most

[5] Tydeus slays all except one of the fifty warriors in the ambush party; he spares Maeon (*Theb.* 2.690–703).

gruesome examples of bloodshed in the poem (5.207–61), perhaps surpassed in horror only by the nocturnal massacre of the sleeping Thebans in the main narrative (10.271–323), which it resembles especially in the admixture of blood and wine that floods the scene (5.255–57; cf. 10.311–13, esp. 312f.). After Gorge plunges a knife through the side of her husband, his eyes still quiver and his lips murmur words of endearment (5.215–17); Alcimede carries her father's head still murmuring (235–37); the banquets overflow with blood (255); wine mixed with blood flows back like a torrent to the drinking cups from gaping throats (256f.); and half-dead children gasp their last breaths as they lie prostrate over the faces of their moaning fathers (259–61).

The Human Condition: Powerlessness and Suffering

Statius goes to considerable lengths to establish a consistent picture of the helplessness of man in an oppressive universe. The poet lays great stress on the pessimistic qualities of the human condition: the limitation of man in regard to his scant knowledge, lack of understanding about the universe, and his general powerlessness. These deficiencies and the unremitting hostility of the gods render man unable to effect any meaningful or lasting improvement in his position. In a number of dramatic situations various characters appear to misunderstand the basic nature of the universe and the position of man vis-à-vis the gods. Even the god-like heroes experience that they are human in regard to their mortality and the limited power of their knowledge.[6] One of the important messages of the text is that the pious are likely to suffer just as much as the wicked in the dispensation of divine retribution and that men and women are punished without regard for their real innocence or guilt. Man occasionally operates under the false assumption that his misfortune is attributable to some offence that has been committed against the gods. A notable instance of this is Thiodamas' mistaken belief that the death of Amphiaraus is punishment for an Argive crime that has been perpetrated (8.318).

Human ignorance in the *Thebaid* takes the form of a general lack of awareness of the harmful machinations of the gods. Although humans are occasionally aware that what transpires is often attributable

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[6] Cf. Rieks (1976: 203).

directly to malevolent deities, most human figures appear to be ignorant of the gods' designs against them despite repeated reminders of supernatural hostility. In responding to Polynices' confession of his ancestry (1.676–81), Adrastus acknowledges the wayward actions of his Argive ancestors, but he presumes that his people will not be held accountable for these past deeds:

> 'ne perge queri casusque priorum
> Adnumerarc tibi: nostro quoque sanguine multum
> Errauit pietas, nec culpa nepotibus obstat.
> Tu modo dissimilis rebus mereare secundis
> Excusare tuos.'
>
> (*Theb.* 1.688–92)
>
> 'Desist from lament, nor recount as yours
> The misfortunes of your forebears. In our race too piety
> Has strayed much, but error does not impede posterity.
> Only, be different yourself, and earn by fortune's favour
> Pardon for your kin.'

Adrastus is not a believer in inherited guilt. But he is mistaken in thinking that heredity is insignificant and that men and women can win pardon for their offspring, as Argos and Thebes will be made to suffer for the deeds of their ancestors (cf. 1.227–47).

Meanwhile Eteocles, as yet untouched by the infernal deities, is shown to be content with his lot and unconcerned about the future:

> pro gnara nihil mortalia fati
> Corda sui! capit ille dapes, habet ille soporem.
>
> (*Theb.* 2.92f.)
>
> Ah! for mortal hearts unaware
> Of their destiny! He banquets and he slumbers.

Although on a human level there is nothing for Eteocles to be worried about at this point, he is clearly incapable of perceiving the growing danger that threatens him from a supernatural level. Polynices similarly is oblivious to the danger that threatens him from above (cf. 1.324–28). The prayers of Eteocles to Jupiter (11.210–25; 248f.) are characterised by a tragic ignorance of the plot of Pluto to destroy him, as shown in his mistaken belief that Jupiter sides with Thebes and his cause (esp. 11.217–21; cf. 248f.). This ignorance applies not only to most victims of supernaturally motivated events but also to the relatives of the victims and the observers of such events.

Notable exceptions include Maeon and Amphiaraus, who are aware of what the future holds but whose warnings go unheeded through

supernatural intervention (2.690–96; 3.620–47). Their prophetic abilities prove to be of no value to them or their compatriots, since they are unable to save their city or themselves from destruction (cf. 3.69–77; 5.735–40). Most of the oracular and prophetic speeches contain omens warning of impending disaster, but these are disregarded, misunderstood, misinterpreted or acted upon to little or no purpose. Dealing in some way with death and destruction, these speeches underscore the *Thebaid*'s concern with war, violence and suffering; more specifically, they emphasise the inutility of divine revelation and the hopelessness of man's position. While the speech of the priestess presaging that he would be the first to die in the war (5.647) is not disregarded by Lycurgus, his helpless reaction demonstrates that this knowledge is of no use to him in preventing the death of Opheltes and this heightens the pathos of the scene. While the significance of Lycurgus' admonition to the Argive forces about the impending war goes unheeded (5.681–89, esp. 688f.), the oracular messages of Apollo (9.650–62) and Tiresias (10.610–15) on the fates of Parthenopaeus and Menoeceus, respectively, are acted upon by Diana (9.726ff.) and Creon (10.624ff., 690ff.) on behalf of the youths, but the attempts to prevent their deaths ultimately prove futile. While the speeches of the priests Amphiaraus (3.620–47; 5.733–52, esp. 738) and Lycurgus (5.681–89) are ignored, the full significance of the omens described by Tiresias (5.483–602) and of the prophecy made by the ghost of Laius (4.626–44) goes uncomprehended.

While various human figures seem aware that the supernatural powers play a significant rôle in the determination of events, they reveal uncertainty about the precise nature of that rôle. The victim Maeon is uncertain whether he owes his fate to the will of the gods, Fortuna ('Fortune'), or the overwhelming power of Tydeus (3.60–62); Eurydice, mother of the victim Opheltes, reveals an ignorance of the dangers posed by the Theban war (cf. 6.138–42) and blames first the gods, then Hypsipyle for her son's death (143–61); and the Argives, observers of the anthropophagous act of Tydeus, are unaware of Tisiphone's prime rôle in its motivation (cf. 9.1–4).

Amphiaraus epitomises the tragic plight of pious humans who are unable to exert any real measure of free will over their own actions under the unremitting control of the gods. He is depicted as a pious *uates*: asked by Adrastus to conduct an augury and reveal the outcome of a future war with Thebes (3.449–52), he does so dutifully and reverentially (471ff.); agitated by the portents of war (547–51), he refuses

to reveal his findings (570–75); motivated by love of his people, he attempts to dissuade them from taking up arms against Thebes (620–45); later he urges Lycurgus to refrain from violence against Hypsipyle (5.669–71) and informs the Argives they must hold obsequies for Opheltes (733–52). Although the Argive priest is against the war, his resolve weakens under the violent attack of Atropos upon his will and the action of his wife Eriphyle who foredooms her husband through her acquisition of the fateful gold necklace (4.187–95). Under this influence of Atropos (189f.) and the watchful eye of Tisiphone (211–13) he drives off to war in his chariot, presenting a conspicuous and fearsome sight with his spear and shield (214–45, esp. 221f.).

Apollo intervenes not only to bring him glory in the chariot race (6.492ff.) but in the great war (7.692ff.). Amphiaraus is aware of the overwhelming presence of Apollo (cf. 7.779f.) as he is borne into the middle of the first battle (698f.) and succumbs completely to the inspiration of the god under the protection and guidance of various deities (695–98, 702–04, 736–59; cf. 779f.). Under the influence and watchful gaze of the higher powers Amphiaraus is filled with an insatiable craving for the violence and bloodshed of war (703–11; cf. 711f.). His character is so transmuted by supernatural forces that he even slays a fellow priest of Apollo against his own will (715f.). Apollo saves Amphiaraus from the spear of Hypseus (736f.) and guides the chariot of his favourite priest across the field even as he drives him to slay a host of warriors in quick succession (738–50, esp. 752f.). In his speeches to Apollo (7.779–88) and Pluto (8.90–122) Amphiaraus displays a hitherto unseen desire for vengeance against his wife for betraying him (7.787f.; 8.104, 120–22). Later he spurs Thiodamas into exhorting the Argives successfully to enter the Theban camp and slaughter the enemy in their sleep (10.206–11). These actions are entirely inconsistent with the former character of Amphiaraus and are attributable to the harmful influence of supernatural powers. Prior to the imposition of divine will upon him, the actions and speeches of the priest reveal a strong moral character; afterward he appears mainly as a figure bent on violence and revenge. After his descent to the underworld (7.816ff.), he is once again revealed as a pious and reverential priest (8.90ff.).

In general man is portrayed as a rational and non-violent being when he is not under the control of supernatural forces, who otherwise counteract civilised humanity. Instances abound on both sides of the war and are epitomised in the figures of Amphiaraus and Oedipus: just as Amphiaraus is depicted as a pious and peace-loving *uates* until

the gods set upon him and fill him with a desire for war and an insatiable blood-lust, the latter is portrayed as bitter and vindictive when he is under the control of the Furies (1.46–87, esp. 51f., 60–72, 68–70; 7.466–69, esp. 468), but is an entirely different person when these powers leave him alone. Upon being freed from their continual influence, Oedipus experiences true parental feelings and expresses deep remorse for fomenting hatred between his sons (11.599ff., esp. 617–21), a display that suggests he could bring himself to curse his sons only because he was under the goddesses' control. This transition in the personalities of the various characters occurs at many different points in the progression of the narrative. Both Amphiaraus and Oedipus undergo a radical transformation of character just prior to their final earthly appearances, but a character such as Eteocles is barely allowed to show even a hint of his real nature (cf. 2.92f.) before he is set upon by supernatural forces (2.102ff.).

The ignorance of humans is apparent especially in the deaths of *Heldenknaben* who are unaware of the perils of war and the imminence of their deaths.[7] They are victims, singled out for death—and they do not know it.[8] The inexperience of Atys and Parthenopaeus is revealed in their delight in military accoutrements and weaponry (8.654–69; 9.694–99) and in their belief that war is a mere game (8.562–64; 9.785f.). Their failure to comprehend the true horrors of war and their unconcern for its dangers originate in their boyish innocence. The Bacchic priest Eunaeus reveals a similar lack of awareness brought about by this youthful innocence and lack of experience in battle (7.649ff.). The young Argives Hopleus and Dymas are ignorant of the ingrained hostility of the higher powers toward pious humanity (10.384f.) and consequently are unmindful of the inevitable failure of their heroic mission to recover the corpse of Tydeus. Of the Seven only Amphiaraus is aware of his impending fate and this knowledge proves useless to him. Neither the warrior-prophet nor the rest of these heroes can do anything to alter their fates.

This ignorance of the perils of war extends to the mothers of the victims. Eurydice never expects that she should have anything to fear from a Theban war:

> 'Non hoc Argolidum coetu circumdata matrum
> Speraui te, nate, sequi, nec talia demens

[7] The dying virgin-warrior motif features prominently in Vergilian (and Statian) epic; see Hardie (1990: 9ff.).

[8] Cf. Schetter (1960: 45).

Fingebam uotis annorum elementa tuorum.
Nil saeuum reputans; etenim his in finibus aeui
Unde ego bella tibi Thebasque ignara timerem?'
(*Theb.* 6.138–42)
'I did not forebode, son, that I should follow you
With this circle of Argolic mothers; nor did I, foolish,
Conceive in my prayers such a beginning to your years.
Nor did I imagine cruelty. For at your stage of life
What fear should I in ignorance have for you from war and Thebes?'

Her words reflect not only her unfulfilled expectations for Opheltes through the contrast between past and present circumstances, but the naïveté of women on both sides of the war who suffer undeservedly from its desolating effects. Inherent in her initial assessment of Opheltes' death is a severe moral judgement on the effects of war upon the innocent, particularly those individuals who are most vulnerable. It is a judgement that bears testimony to the tragic futility of war.

Although prominent figures such as Adrastus (cf. 3.388–93, esp. 390; 3.712–20; 4.1–4), Amphiaraus (3.620–47) and Jocasta (7.497–527; 11.329–53) attempt to prevent or delay the war, only Amphiaraus seems to be aware that the gods are ultimately responsible for the commencement of hostilities and that any opposition to their plans is futile (4.630f., 646f.). The repeated attempts of Adrastus and Jocasta to avert war are illustrative of the basic but misplaced trust of man in his own power to control his destiny and effect some improvement in his position. Later Adrastus, Jocasta and Antigone attempt to prevent the duel between Polynices and Eteocles from taking place, but only Jocasta appears to realise that the duel is supernaturally engineered and therefore beyond the power of man to prevent (11.329–31; compare the comment of Argia after the fratricide: *extremas sed quis deus egit in iras?*, 'But what god drove them to the limits of anger?', 12.401). In a supreme act of unselfishness Adrastus even offers his throne to Polynices to stop the duel (11.433–35) but fails to see that his son-in-law's motivation for fighting Eteocles rests ultimately with supernatural powers. As he entreats the brothers to lay aside their fury (11.431), he ironically asks, *ubi iura deique* ('Where are the natural laws and the gods?', 430), unaware that the gods *are* close by and—with the exception of Pietas ('Piety', 472–82) and Fortuna ('Fortune', 447–56)—will not intervene *except* to promote the fratricide (482ff.).

Occasionally Adrastus is successful in preventing divinely-inspired bloodshed, for instance, when he saves Lycurgus from a raging Argive mob (5.699–709) who are deceived by Fama ('Rumour') into believing

that he has slain Hypsipyle (691–98), but this represents a rare success in the face of persistent supernatural opposition. In situations when the gods do not intervene directly or indirectly in Argive affairs, Adrastus is shown to be a highly effective ruler totally in control of his subjects and his faculties. The most notable instance occurs just after the arrival of Polynices and Tydeus in Argos: when the exiles come to blows, the monarch intervenes to prevent further bloodshed, quickly calming the antagonists and thereby saving the life of Polynices (1.435ff.). Elsewhere Adrastus restores order along with Amphiaraus to a potentially explosive situation when Lycurgus threatens to slay Hypsipyle (5.669–71) and with the assistance of his warriors restrains the raging Capaneus from overwhelming Alcidimas during the funeral games (6.809–12).

Numerous incidents illustrate the helplessness of mankind against the power of the gods. Once Statius himself is moved sufficiently to apostrophise: *quid numina contra / tendere fas homini?* ('What power does man have against the gods?', 6.692f.). Man is consistently shown to be subject to the control of malevolent superhuman powers who display little or no concern for his welfare. The gods are depicted frequently imposing their will upon various human figures and propelling them to destruction. Nowhere is the general powerlessness of man more evident than in the scenes involving the Furies, namely Tisiphone and Megaera. On a number of occasions they intervene physically to prevent various human figures from acting in accordance with their real desires. Polynices does not really want to confront his brother in a duel (cf. 11.137–48) and considers fleeing the scene or taking his own life (138f.).[9] Megaera intervenes and infuses Polynices with the urge to slay Eteocles and to seek death in his kinsman's blood (150–54).[10] When Adrastus begins to assuage his anger, Polynices is set upon again by the Fury who physically hurls the exile on to his horse to search for his brother (196–204). A short while later the rage of Polynices subsides in response to the plea of his sister (382–87), whereupon Tisiphone violently pushes Eteocles through the Theban gates on to the plain to meet his brother in single combat (11.387–89; cf. 382f.). The brothers are completely impotent before

[9] Polynices scarcely 'by an act of will, ignores' the foreboding vision of his grief-stricken wife Argia (*Theb.* 11.140–48), 'his rejection a matter of choice', as Vessey (1992: xl) asserts, since Fate's admonitions and approaching death provoke him to fear what he senses (11.149f.) before the intercession of Megaera.

[10] Vessey (1992: xli) declares that Tisiphone strikes Polynices with her lash (*Theb.* 11.150f.), whereas 11.109–11 establishes that Megaera lashes him.

these deities and their helplessness characterises the position of man in the universe. These incidents are just a few of the many instances of harmful supernatural intervention that elicit the sympathy of the reader specifically for the plight of the brothers[11] and more generally for the unfortunate lot of humankind.

The Furies are portrayed directly as imposing their will on various human figures more frequently than any of the other supernatural powers in the main narrative. In addition to bringing about the fratricide by influencing the actions of the brothers, the Furies conspire to prompt Oedipus' curse on his sons (cf. 1.51f.), set upon Eteocles and Polynices and infuse them with jealousy and hatred of each other and an insatiable lust for power (1.123ff.; 7.467), provoke Tydeus to commit his anthropophagous act (8.751ff.; cf. 71f.), arouse Capaneus to his insane challenge of Jupiter (10.831ff.; cf. 76f.), rouse Creon to forbid the burial of the Argive corpses (11.661–64; cf. 8.72–74), and inflame many other individuals to violence (e.g., 8.344–47). These and other incidents attest to the general powerlessness of man and his lack of free will in a world dominated by malevolent and uncaring deities.

The Argives and Thebans are shown frequently being attacked and infused with a lust for war by Mars with the result that men on both sides are completely under the influence of the bloodthirsty deity. This is the case in the scene at Argos following Ampiharaus' refusal to divulge the findings of his auspice-taking to his compatriots:

> . . . bellipotens prae se deus agmina passim
> Mille rapit; liquere domos dilectaque laeti
> Conubia et primo plorantes limine natos:
> Tantus in attonitos cecidit deus.
> (*Theb.* 3.577–80; cf. 580–93)
> . . . the powerful war-god rouses before him
> A thousand troops far and wide; joyfully they leave their homes
> And beloved wives and children sobbing upon the threshold,
> So mightily does the god whip the frenzied troops.

The war-god's complete domination of the soldiery and the unnatural response of the men to the prospect of war are shown in their eagerness to leave their homes and families. These characteristics are also apparent in a passage describing the recommencement of hostilities between the two sides:

[11] *Contra* Moore (1921: 108): 'Polynices and Eteocles . . . could not possibly evoke much sympathy from the ancient audience, and they make less appeal today'.

Stat medius campis etiamnum cuspide sicca
Bellipotens, iamque hos clipeum, iam uertit ad illos
Arma ciens aboletque domos, conubia, natos.
Pellitur et patriae et, qui mente nouissimus exit,
Lucis amor; tenet in capulis hastisque paratas
Ira manus, animusque ultra thoracas anhelus
Conatur, galeaeque tremunt horrore comarum.
Quid mirum caluisse uiros?

(*Theb.* 8.383–90; cf. 390–94)

In mid-plain War's powerful god stands with spear still dry,
And turns his shield now against these, now against those, inciting
To arms and suppressing memory of homes, wives, and children.
Love of country is driven out, and love of life, which departs
Last from the heart. Rage holds their hands ready on sword-hilts
And spears; the panting spirit labours beyond the breastplates;
And the helmets shake with crests uprisen in fright.
What wonder that the heroes are inflamed?

This arousal of the men by the war-god is so effective that all thoughts of home and family are obliterated in their insatiate lust for war.

The unsuitability of the Theban race for war is apparent in another passage stressing the agency of Mars in the instigation of martial violence (7.168–73). Earlier the Thebans, as yet untainted by the influence of Mars, are shown to be unenthusiastic in their preparations for war and give thought only to their families (4.349–56). Similarly the Argives are portrayed as being reluctant to leave their families and homes even though Bellona has already inspired them with a desire for war (4.5–31). The helplessness of these citizens before the gods and the inevitability of the divinely engineered war is self-evident in these passages, but Statius leaves his audience in no doubt as to the pathetic nature of the human condition when he observes:

... cum fracta impulsaque Fatis
Consilia et tandem miseri data copia belli.

(*Theb.* 4.3f.)

... when the Fates intervened and forced counsel
To give way, and wretched war at last was given a free rein.

There are perhaps no verses in the poem more concise than these in summing up the human position vis-à-vis the gods: the failure of man to find a peaceful solution to his problems is directly attributable to the destructive machinations of the higher powers.

The inability of man to exert any meaningful control over his own destiny is given special prominence in the digressive episodes. The Argives are portrayed consistently as being helpless before the power

of Apollo in the Coroebus story (1.562ff., esp. 571–90, 596–604, 605–33). They are unable to prevent the monster that Apollo has sent upon the city from devouring their children and they can do nothing to prevent the pestilence sent by the god from taking its devastating toll. In the narrative of Hypsipyle the Lemnian women are completely under the influence of Venus and the Furies when they sacrifice Charops' son (5.156–65), slaughter their husbands (5.190–240; cf. 85–169) and later are compelled by Venus, Amor ('Love') and Juno to fall in love with the Argonauts (445ff.). The imposition of divine will upon the helpless women leaves them no chance of exercising their free will. Hypsipyle is the sole figure to remain unaffected by the destructive influence of the gods, yet she suffers no less than the other women.

The inability of the Argives or the Thebans to prevent the war from occurring bears further testimony to the general powerlessness of man before the higher powers. On a few occasions Adrastus takes steps to forestall the war but is hindered by the gods in his attempts. The monarch holds a lengthy consultation with Polynices and Tydeus and they resolve that Tydeus should journey to Thebes and urge Eteocles to allow Polynices to return safely and take his rightful place on the throne (2.367–70). Jupiter has already made sure that Eteocles will not abdicate (1.292–302; cf. 2.93–127) and he claims responsibility for the ambush of Tydeus that the monarch orders (3.235–38). Eteocles is portrayed as a helpless victim of the supernatural powers without any control over his own destiny (cf. 2.92f.). Prior to the imposition of divine will upon Eteocles there is no specific indication that the monarch would refuse to hand over the reigns of power to his brother. Despite the failure of Tydeus' mission and the treachery of Eteocles, Adrastus still is not eager for war and appears determined to avoid undertaking it if at all possible (3.388–93). Even when Mars infects the Argives with an insatiable desire for battle (3.407–39), the pious monarch would prefer to maintain peace but is under considerable pressure from his subjects to sanction war (440–49).

Adrastus decides that Amphiaraus and Melampus should conduct an augury and reveal the future (3.449–52). Amphiaraus prays to Jupiter to send clear signs of what the Fates hold (489–96), whereupon the cosmocrator sends no uncertain sign of his resolve to destroy Argos. While Melampus describes the general signs of foreboding concerning the fate of Argos (502–15), Amphiaraus portends the actual defeat of the city in a detailed description of a gory fight that occurs between seven eagles representing the Argive princes and a group of swans denoting the Thebans. The attack of the eagles upon the swans parallels

the Argive attack upon Thebes. At first the eagles have the advantage, but Jupiter ensures that the swans gain the ascendancy and prevail over their opponents (3.530ff.); similarly, the anger of Jupiter in the main narrative prompts the gods to bring about a Theban victory after the Argives gain the upper hand early in the war.

The fate of the eagles anticipates the tragic lot of the Seven.[12] One of the eagles, representing Capaneus, dies instantly after catching fire from a sudden flash of the sun (3.539f.); this spectacle parallels the scene of mortal transfiguration where Capaneus is struck and consumed by Jupiter's thunderbolt (10.921–39). Another eagle, with tender wings, pursues and is overwhelmed by stronger birds (3.540f.), just as the young Parthenopaeus pursues and is vanquished by warriors much more powerful and experienced than himself (9.683ff.). A third eagle, which falls clinging to his opponent (3.542), foreshadows the deaths of Polynices and Eteocles, who slay each other and then die in each other's embrace (11.540–73). The action of yet another eagle in abandoning his flock (3.542f.) anticipates the action of Adrastus, who flees from the field just prior to the commencement of the brothers' duel (11.439–43). An eagle overwhelmed by a rain-cloud (3.544) foreshadows the death of Hippomedon, who is overwhelmed by the river Ismene (9.315ff.), while the anthropophagous death of Tydeus (8.760f.) is foreshadowed in the action of the eagle who devours a swan (3.544f.). Finally Amphiaraus recognises a falling eagle as symbolic of his own death in the coming war (3.546–47; cf. 7.794ff.).

Amphiaraus is frightened by the meaning of the portents (3.547–51) and refuses initially to reveal the findings of his auspice-taking when he realises the tragic consequences of the impending war (570–75). After Mars again descends upon Argos to arouse the populace to war (575–97), the priest attempts to persuade his compatriots to refrain from fighting (620–45); finally, he realises the futility of attempting to avert a conflict that supernatural powers have contrived to bring about:

> 'Sed quid uana cano, quid fixos arceo casus?
> Ibimus—'
>
> (*Theb.* 3.646f.)
>
> 'But why do I prophesy in vain, ward off a fated end?
> I shall go—'

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[12] Cf. Snijder (1968: *ad Theb.* 3.502, 539, 540, 541–44, 546), Mozley (1928a: 490) and Vessey (1973: 154f.).

Despite his foreknowledge of the war and its disastrous outcome, Amphiaraus is powerless to prevent events from unfolding. The prophetic powers of the priest prove to be of no value either to himself or his compatriots, since they give him the power only to read the future, not to alter it.

In a lengthy editorial comment the poet suggests that man has an insatiate appetite for knowledge of the future (3.551ff.), yet his desire for and limited acquisition of this knowledge lead generally to much anxiety and fear on his part:

> nos, prauum et flebile uulgus
> Scrutari penitus superos: hinc pallor et irae,
> Hinc scelus insidiaeque et nulla modestia uoti.
> (*Theb.* 3.563–65; cf. 547–51)
> We, a depraved and wretched mob,
> Ponder deeply the secrets of the gods; hence come wrath and fear,
> Hence crime and treachery, and lack of restraint in prayer.

The ability of man to acquire some limited knowledge of the future is counterbalanced by his corresponding inability to use or act upon that knowledge for his own benefit.

After Amphiaraus' prophecy and attempts to prevent war fall on deaf ears, Adrastus is portrayed as being sickened by the thought of war and his troops prepare for the initial engagement (4.38–41). There is simply nothing that Adrastus or Amphiaraus can do to prevent from occurring what the gods have ordained. The most that Adrastus can do is to delay the inevitable outbreak of war for two years (cf. 4.1–4) by arguing that adequate preparation for war is time-consuming, as instanced in his reply to Argia when she urges him to go to war in defence of her husband's cause (3.712–20). Accordingly their failure is paradigmatic of the frustration and futility of mankind.

Jocasta too attempts to avert war by persuading Polynices to negotiate his claim to the throne with Eteocles instead of attempting to gain power forcefully (7.497–527). Her speech, which stresses the importance of family ties, has a sudden and dramatic impact upon Polynices and the Argive troops (527ff.) and initially it appears that Polynices will agree to meet peacefully with his brother (527ff., esp. 534–38).[13] However, Tydeus tries to convince Polynices of the imprudence of this course of action (539–59) and his words sway the troops to crave war again (559–63), although there is no mention of Polynices' response.

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[13] Jocasta is certainly *not*, as Vessey (1992: xxxviii) asserts, 'one cause of the war'.

But it is the direct intervention of Erinys that is ultimately responsible for the outbreak of hostilities (562f.). She attacks and infuses a pair of tigers with madness so they wreak destruction among the Argive troops, an incident that leads directly to a confrontation between warriors of both sides (564ff.).[14] The Greek council breaks up and Jocasta is forced to flee from the camp (611ff.). Later Antigone tries to dissuade Polynices from meeting Eteocles in single combat (11.363–82). Her powerful plea partly assuages his anger against even the will of Megaera (382–87), while Jocasta's appeal to Eteocles apparently has a soothing effect upon the monarch (375f.). At this point Tisiphone pushes Antigone aside and hurls Eteocles through the Theban gates to confront Polynices (382–88). Tisiphone and Megaera then incite the brothers against one another and even guide the reins of their horses into the fray (403–05). After the duel commences Adrastus intervenes and tries to stop it, but his attempt fails and he flees from the scene (424–46). Pietas ('Piety') also intervenes on behalf of humanity but is repelled by Tisiphone (447–96), thereby enhancing the sub-theme of man's powerlessness before the onslaught of the cruel supernatural powers. The predicament of Adrastus and that of other human figures in the poem who promote the cause of peace without success exemplifies the inability of man to exert any meaningful control over his own destiny.

The tragic consequences of martial violence are evident in the deaths of men of all ages and from every walk of life—the young (e.g., 9.765), the aged (e.g., 7.718–22), the nobleman (e.g., 10.774–79), the peasant (e.g., 9.305), the seafarer (e.g., 9.305), the landlubber (e.g., 9.306f.), the hierophant (e.g., 7.649–83) and the muse-inspired (e.g., 8.548–53). Death strikes equally warriors of differing physical abilities, appearances and moral persuasions—the strong (e.g., 9.526–36), the weak (e.g., 8.583–88), the handsome (e.g., 9.764), the brave (e.g., 9.290–92) and the morally depraved (e.g., 7.757–59). Nor does it fail to afflict every rank of soldier—the cavalryman, the foot soldier and the charioteer (e.g., 8.445–47).

Statius reveals his sympathy for the lot of man and sensitivity to human suffering mainly in the lament scenes. The suffering of the Theban and Argive races, whose peoples are portrayed as the defenceless victims of supernatural cruelty and injustice, demonstrates

[14] This direct intervention of Erinys shows that the incident is not merely a 'supernatural "accident"', as Ahl (1986: 2882) asserts.

the inability of man to control his own destiny against the overwhelming power of the gods. Notable scenes of suffering are framed around the deaths of *Heldenknaben* that evolve out of incidents of violence in a war instigated by the gods. The focus of these scenes is usually a speech of mourning or consolation spoken over the victims that illustrates the suffering of the survivors. Since the suffering endured by the youthful victims of violence and by the parents and children of the deceased is instigated mainly through the harmful intervention of the higher powers, it appears for the most part to be undeserved. The pathetic effect of these lament scenes helps to stress the suffering of man and to highlight his complete helplessness in preventing this wastage of human life.

The laments of the mourners over the victims are expressions of the grief experienced by the mothers of the slain and serve to particularise the general sense of loss and sorrow. This is well illustrated in the scene of unrestrained lamentation that follows the return to Thebes and subsequent death of Maeon (3.114–217). Statius initially describes the actions of the mourning women (114–32), then turns his attention to the figure of Ide, whose grief-stricken countenance and lament betray her immense suffering (133ff.). The lament of Ide over the brothers Thespiadae serves as a verbal manifest for the grief and bereavement experienced by the Theban mothers (151–68). Ide complains ironically about her sons' inglorious and obscure deaths, which have deprived her of the small consolation that their heroic end in battle would have brought her (160–64); in fact the poet does ensure her sons' fame (2.629f.), especially when he recounts the tale of their joint demise (630–43) and her lament (3.151–68; cf. 133–39), but obviously this is of no direct consolatory benefit to her. The subsequent narrative shows the other Theban women mourning in a similar manner to Ide (169ff.). Further heightening the atmosphere of loss and grief that pervades the dramatic situation is the consolatory speech of Aletes (179–213), which arouses pathos for the unjust plight of the young victims of the war.

A number of other scenes framed around speeches of mourning and consolation are spoken over the youthful victims of violence. These speeches of lament are given by Hypsipyle (scene: 5.588–637; speech: 608–35) and Eurydice (scene: 6.25–33, 135–92; speech: 138–73, 174–78, 180–84) over Opheltes; Ismenis over Crenaeus (scene: 9.351–403; speech: 376–98); Eurydice over Menoeceus (scene: 10.783–826; speech: 793–814), and Creon over Menoeceus (scene: 12.60–104; speech: 72–

92, 94–102). Other passages portraying the suffering arising out of the sense of loss and grief that accompanies the tragic deaths of the young victims of war occur after the demise of Eunaeus (7.683–87) and Atys (8.636–54) and before the passing of Parthenopaeus (9.570–635); a portentous and climactic effect is created by the insertion of the latter passage describing the grief of Atalanta *before* rather than after the death of her young son. Later the deaths of the *Heldenknaben* are given special emphasis in the pathetic description of Atalanta bewailing the fate of Parthenopaeus (12.805–07). Yet Parthenopaeus is unaware that his mother and Diana have attempted to assist him in every conceivable way (9.906f.; cf. 608–35, 663–69, 726–75); the final, tragic irony is that it makes no difference.

The final book contains three scenes of general lamentation, one showing the grief and bereavement of the Thebans (12.1–59) and two depicting the sorrow of the Argives (105–40; 797–809). It is significant that the book commences and ends with general scenes of lamentation over the victims of two different wars (1–59; 797–807). The war between Thebes and Argos is nothing but a tragic waste of human life, as shown in the two scenes of lamentation at the commencement of book twelve (1–59; 105–40). Despite the apparent justice of the Athenian cause in the armed conflict with Thebes, the basic nature of war itself does not change: the tragic consequences of martial violence are death and suffering. The poem concludes with a scene of lamentation depicting the distraught Argive women mourning over the corpses of their sons and husbands (797–807). An air of guarded hope and optimism for the future of mankind does emerge midway through the final book (12.481ff.) in the appearance of the benevolent goddess Clementia ('Clemency'), but the late insertion of this ideal into a text replete with various episodes of violent destruction and extreme suffering is not enough to dispel the pall of gloom and despair that overhangs the poem; hence the appropriateness of this final brief scene of mourning. Speeches of mourning and consolation stressing the suffering of the survivors are also the focus of scenes of lamentation that follow the deaths of Amphiaraus (scene: 8.162–217; speech: 174–207), Tydeus (scene: 9.1–85; speech: 49–72, 75f.), and Eteocles and Polynices (scene: 11.580–647; speech: 605–26, 630f.; scene: 12.312–419; speech: 322–48). The purpose of the aforementioned general and particular scenes of lamentation is to arouse pathos for the tragic fates of the victims of violence and for the suffering endured by their families and friends.

The unwarranted aspect of the suffering that afflicts the Argive and Theban races is stressed in a number of passages in the speeches and main narrative of the poem (e.g., 1.281f.; 3.291). It has already been demonstrated that the tragic deaths of the Seven, Eteocles and of lesser figures such as Menoeceus are the direct result of the gods' plans for the partial destruction of mankind.[15] The pathetic figure of Adrastus in particular epitomises the lot of those who resist the use of unnecessary violence in opposition to the destructive plans of the gods: he is sickened by the prospect of martial violence (4.38–41) but is powerless to prevent the war (cf. 2.367–70; 3.388–92), is unable to forestall the fratricide (e.g., 11.196f.; 429–35); must endure the devastation of his army (11.21–56) and kingdom (cf. 12.1–59; 12.797–807), experiences the indignity of fleeing from the field of battle (11.434–43), and suffers the loss of his adopted sons-in-law (cf. 11.572f.).

Women such as Antigone and Ismene not only incarnate the traditional weakness and helplessness of women in war but also the virtuous qualities of womankind: they are innocent of any wrongdoing yet their heroic virtuousness achieves no purpose (cf. 8.607–09; 12.186); they are helpless to avert the martial and fraternal violence that afflicts their city (cf. 7.534–37; 11.363–82); they suffer grief and bereavement as the result of unceasing divine hostility against their race (8.654f.; 12.380–88; cf. 12.404–04); and Antigone in particular displays unflinching courage in the face of overwhelming human and supernatural opposition (12.184–86; 452–63). The scene in which Antigone and Ismene lament privately the misfortunes of their family draws attention to the undeserved nature of their suffering:

> Interea thalami secreta in parte sorores,
> Par aliud morum miserique innoxia proles
> Oedipodae, uarias miscent sermone querelas.
> Nec mala quae iuxta, sed longa ab origine fati,
> Haec matris taedas, oculos ast illa paternos,
> Altera regnantem, profugum gemit altera fratrem,
> Bella ambae.
>
> (*Theb.* 8.607–13)
>
> Meanwhile in a secret part of their chamber the sisters,
> A pair unlike their brothers in conduct, the guiltless offspring

[15] Cf. Ahl (1966: 80), who recognises that the chief warriors among the Seven are the victims of the machinations of the supernatural powers, but attributes the downfall of these heroes in part to their inability to control their emotions and the brothers' insatiable craving for power without pointing out that these are largely inspired by the gods.

Of wretched Oedipus, mix their varied complaints with converse.
Not bemoaning their present ills, but from the far origins
Of their fate, this one laments their mother's marriage, that one their
Father's eyes; this one the ruling brother, that one the exile;
Both deplore the war.

These heroic women are portrayed as the unfortunate victims of a war that forms only one chapter in the ongoing saga of familial violence and divine enmity that comprises the history of Thebes.

Even the pious Argia is a victim, although she does exhort Adrastus to allow Polynices to undertake war against Thebes (3.687ff.), a request that she realises she may well come to regret (3.707–10)—and in fact does (12.336f.). Her request is a tragic error of judgement, but she is not actually guilty of any crime. Argia's urgent appeal actually highlights her humanity since it is based mainly on familial and marital reasons and is motivated out of pity for the misfortune of her husband and appreciation of the justice of his cause (cf. 3.696–98). Her devotion to Polynices is further illustrated in her attempt to bury his corpse, an undertaking that is described as being conceived by an unwomanly valour (12.177) because of its magnitude and for which she must therefore unsex herself (178); the enterprise is also represented as a heroic challenge to the merciless gods and the tyrant Eteocles (184–86).

But women in the *Thebaid* are not entirely immune from irrationality and violence. The most dramatic example of this is the divinely-motivated slaughter of the Lemnian men by their wives (5.195ff.). Since critics are so fond of pointing to the piety of women, they generally discount the implications of Eriphyle's greed and Eurydice's display of jealousy and anger against Hypsipyle. Eriphyle has not the slightest compunction about sacrificing her husband Amphiaraus in war to gain possession of Harmonia's golden necklace (2.299–305), although it must be pointed out that a host of sinister goddesses—Decor ('Charm'), Luctus ('Sorrow'), Irae ('Anguish'), Dolor ('Emotion') and Discordia ('Discord')—incorporate a vast array of afflictions fateful to women (and their relations) into the necklace (276–88, esp. 287f.); as one of these ills includes the overpowering urge to possess it (283–84), women such as Jocasta (whose mien elsewhere is likened to *Eumenidum antiquissima*, 'the most ancient of the Furies', 7.477 and the divinely aroused Agave, 11.318–20), Eriphyle and even Argia come under its seductive influence (2.294–302; cf. 290–93). When Eriphyle takes possession of it, the lurking presence of Tisiphone is apparent (4.211–13), enhancing this impression of insidious supernatural control over women.

Eurydice demands the death of Hysipyle (6.138–76) and when the queen realises the Argive princes will not grant her request, she attempts to deny the nurse even the privilege of publicly mourning her charge's death (180–84). There is admittedly a fine line between vindictiveness and righteous anger, but the overpowering urge of Eurydice for revenge is scarcely the desire of a pious woman. Eurydice's overwhelming grief and resentment of Hypsipyle transmute into anger and jealousy; she is poisoned by these feelings in much the same way that Creon is consumed by indignation and bitterness in response to the death of Menoeceus. But unlike Creon, she is unroused by the gods and does not actually commit an act of violence.

The impression of the fear and terror that grip the weak and innocent victims of violence in the poem—women, children, the elderly and infirm—is unsurpassed as the Thebans prepare to defend their city against the Argive onslaught:

> Consumpsit uentura timor: iam tecta replerant
> Templaque, et ingratae uallantur planctibus arae.
> Vna omnes eademque subit formido per annos:
> Poscunt fata senes, ardet palletque iuuentus,
> Atria femineis trepidant ululata querelis.
> Flent pueri et flendi nequeunt cognoscere causas
> Attoniti et tantum matrum lamenta trementes.
> (*Theb.* 10.563–69; cf. 552ff.)
> Fear consumes impending events; homes and temples already
> Are crowded, and the ungrateful altars are ringed with lament.
> The same terror afflicts everyone of all ages alike.
> Old men demand their fate; youth becomes fiery and pale in turns;
> Halls tremble with the wailing and complaints of women.
> Distraught children cry and, unable to discern the cause
> Of their crying, tremble only because of their mother's sobs.

The undeserved suffering of the human race is further stressed in Jovian references to the destruction of innocent cities and races (7.23f.; 10.3f.). Although Statius' main emphasis is on human suffering at the hands of the gods, he is also careful to stress the suffering that is endured by a people subject to the caprices of a tyrannical monarch. There is mention of the tragic loss of innocent lives and the suffering endured by the weak and helpless under the rule of Eteocles (3.169–73, 206–12; 11.269–96). The scene of general lamentation following Tydeus' massacre of the Theban ambush party is especially effective in arousing pathos for the unfortunate victims and surviving relatives and in illustrating the extreme suffering experienced by a people subject

to a cruel monarch (3.114–32). But even these examples of human suffering can be attributed in the first instance to the actions of the higher powers.

Violence and suffering so completely dominate the poetic narrative of the *Thebaid* that the overwhelming feeling is one of the complete horror and futility of war. Statius moves in reaction to warfare and its horrors; his abhorrence of war is suggested in the violent atmosphere, gory descriptions and tragic consequences of the fighting that takes place. Almost no one emerges unscathed from the effects of the fighting: the *Heldenknaben* are cut down in a tragic and futile war while the widowed, orphaned, aged and frail survivors are left only to vent their grief and bear their losses. This picture of human suffering and woe contributes greatly to the overall impression of despair and ruination that pervades the poem. Statius is also intent upon stressing the limited nature of human power and knowledge in relation to that exercised by supernatural powers and upon drawing attention to the immense human suffering caused by the unremitting hostility of the gods. The Thebans and Argives are largely portrayed as the helpless victims of a war instigated by the supernatural powers in order to destroy their races. The imposition of divine will upon humanity is seen consistently to be the major factor behind the weak and helpless state of mankind and its lack of free will.

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY ROME

> δισσάς τε φωνὰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν,
> τὴν μὲν δικαίαν, τὴν δ' ὅπως ἐτύγχανεν . . .
>
> Euripides, *Hippolytus* 928f.
>
> All men [should] have two distinct voices, one genuine,
> One for whatever else they happen to say . . .

> πολλάκις δὲ ἢ πρὸς τύραννον ἢ ἄλλως βίαιόν τινα διαλεγόμενοι καὶ ὀνειδίσαι ὁρμῶντες χρῄζομεν ἐξ ἀνάγκης σχήματος λόγου . . .
>
> Demetrius, *On Style* 289
>
> Often when what we say is directed toward a tyrant or someone who is violent in some other way, and when we want to censure him, we are compelled to use figured speech.

Literary critics are accustomed to considering the often ambiguous position of writers in modern Africa, the Americas and the former East European bloc who have composed their works in a climate of political repression and whose literary output is subject to official scrutiny. This usually takes the form of examining how writers employ various rhetorical stratagems such as encoding, ambiguity, irony, allegory, displacement of meaning, proverbial language, metaphor, circumlocution and cryptic expression to express their disapproval of and opposition to régimes. However, many scholars writing about the literature of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods either deny steadfastly that imperial poets could have utilised some of the same verbal strategies as modern writers to comment critically upon the Principate or go to great lengths to avoid considering the issue for fear of having their ideas labelled as cavalier and fanciful.

Did contemporary audiences of Statius relate the controlling ideas, events, characters and setting in the *Thebaid* to their own age? And specifically to the political circumstances in Rome? Naturally an investigation of these questions entails speculation. Mythological subject matter precludes politico-historical specificity. But considering these questions is central to achieving a better understanding of the thematic and political dimensions of the epic. Subject of much controversy, the extent to which audiences in the late first century CE[1] applied the lessons of the *Thebaid* to their own situation demands reflexion.

Text and Context: The Thebaid *and Flavian Rome*

Many scholars deny that there is any relation between the controlling ideas of the *Thebaid* and the political situation in contemporary Rome. Rothfeld contends that the troubles of Thebes attracted little interest during the Flavian period.[2] Loesch argues that Statius' choice of theme shows that he wanted to display his poetic and rhetorical gifts without treating political themes or glorifying Rome.[3] Hadas denies that the poem has any relevance to the concerns of contemporary Romans.[4] Schetter observes that the *Thebaid* is a purely mythological epic and does not have any general applicability to Rome as do the works of Vergil and Lucan.[5] Venini contends that the emphasis on the theme of tyranny in the epic can be attributed primarily to its use in schools as a rhetorical commonplace and does not have any direct relation to the political situation in Rome.[6] The references in Seneca (*Controv.* 1.7; 2.13; 3.6; 4.7; 5.8; 9.27) and Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* 7.2.25, 7.3; 8.3; 9.2.81) to the use of the theme in rhetorical exercises suggest that the theme had long assumed an important rôle in the schools, but simply to attribute one of the controlling ideas in the epic to rhetorical influence is to dismiss without consideration the possibility that Statius has taken refuge in the myth of the Seven to cast political aspersions on the emperors, including Domitian,[7] under the guise of fiction. Dio Cassius points to the use of the theme by professional rhetoricians who were punished with exile or execution by the emperor Domitian on account of his suspicion of their real motives (59.20.6f.; 67.12.5).

Even recent studies fail to comprehend the *Thebaid*'s political dimensions. Snijder acknowledges a vague connexion between the despairing tone of the epic and mood of pre-Flavian Rome, but rejects the notion that Statius was attempting to use the mythological framework of the Theban legend primarily as a means of exploring the political and

[1] All dates in this chapter are CE unless otherwise indicated.
[2] Rothfeld (1912–13: 43).
[3] Loesch (1927: 65).
[4] Hadas (1936: 155).
[5] Schetter (1960: 125).
[6] Venini (1965: 162, 164f.).
[7] Most scholars today, for example, Gossage (1972: 208ff.), Verstraete (1983: 200f.) and Vessey (1983: 211), repudiate the notion that Statius was even remotely hostile or resentful toward Domitian.

spiritual tensions of his age.[8] Vessey argues against the subversive potential of the *Thebaid* and disclaims the notion that the epic contains even the faintest suggestion of political allegory.[9] Frassinetti claims that the inconsistency in the spiritual world of the poem precludes the possibility of deriving any message and subscribes to Schetter's view that the *Thebaid* lacks a higher purpose and a compelling moral sense.[10] Ogilvie flatly asserts, 'The poem is not in any sense the author's testament about the world . . .'.[11] In Hutchinson's view the *Thebaid* is 'essentially removed from the Roman world . . .'.[12]

The possibility that in Statius' manipulation of the prototypical myth of internecine war there is embodied his perception of the deepest and darkest truths about the nature of Roman society cannot be so easily dismissed. Since it ignores some obvious advantages to the writer of mythological composition in first century Rome, the idea that the mythological superstructure of the *Thebaid* wholly or partly precludes the application of its themes to the contemporary situation is misconceived. Vessey asserts that the reason for Statius' choice of subject is 'of course unknown'.[13] This is true in that no authorial explanation survives, but it is a matter that merits consideration none the less. On the surface it may have appeared to some Romans—as it did to later scholars (namely those of the seventeenth century such as Barclay, Cruceus, Gronouius, Guyet, Barth and Beraldus[14]) and as it has to many modern critics—that Statius was attempting mainly to evoke interest in the setting, events and characters of the myth. Other than Ogilvie's infamous assertion that the epic 'cannot be said to be *about* anything',[15] probably no suggestion about the *Thebaid* can be made that more quickly consigns Statius to the status of a second-rate poetic hack than the one he is merely setting the 'divine traditional epic machinery . . . creaking into motion',[16] or to phrase it another way, the 'gods of Statius are, for the most part, mere conventions',[17]

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[8] Snijder (1968: 21).
[9] Vessey (1973: 63f.).
[10] Frassinetti (1973: 253).
[11] Ogilvie (1980: 234).
[12] Hutchinson (1993: 73).
[13] Vessey (1992: xi).
[14] Barclay (1601), Cruceus (1618), Gronouius (1653), Guyet (1658), Barth (1664) and Beraldus (1685).
[15] Ogilvie (1980: 234).
[16] As an anonymous reader for *TAPhA* has remarked (1991).
[17] Feder (1986: 414).

or yet another, the epic's 'movement is obstructed with dead gods'.[18] Hainsworth (repeating Schetter's remark made more than thirty years earlier[19]) declares that the *Thebaid* is a 'purely mythological' epic.[20] Far from it.

In fact the Greek legend of the Theban war enables Statius to treat the controlling ideas of his poem with great subtlety and intricacy. The fictitious nature of myth presents him with an ideal opportunity to infuse contemporary meaning and relevance into the *Thebaid* independent of the action in the surface story. Although Statius' contemporaries naturally will have been unsure of his intentions at times (as critics are today) and, as Rudd says, 'We cannot know, of course, how many of Statius' readers felt the [Theban/Flavian] parallel to be subversive',[21] a refined audience, perhaps one including those who were involved in political activity, would not have failed to appreciate the relevance of the ideas and events in the poem to their own age. Indeed Quintilian suggests that an audience of the first century would have been especially sensitive to the social and political undercurrents of the time when he observes that they would not have been slow to grasp the unfavourable implications of a particular passage (*Inst. Or.* 8.3.47), thinking (in the proximate words of Ovid) that whatever is veiled is better (*si qua latent, meliora putat, Met.* 1.502).

That the *Thebaid* has been so misunderstood and has proved to be so elusive to many scholars who have failed to understand its basic meaning as well as its broader moral, social and political implications is a measure not only of its complexity (which depends principally on the levels of meaning that a work assumes) and literary worth (for true poetry reveals what cannot be said directly), but also the result of a tendency among these scholars to presume the sincerity of Roman poets who give surface praise to their emperors.[22] Undoubtedly more room exists for Statius in an artistic sense to manipulate a traditional myth in order to convey his meaning than if he were to reveal his meaning in a forthright manner. It is no doubt partly the exclusiveness and ambiguity of the textual references that have

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[18] Durant (1944: 316).
[19] Schetter (1960: 125).
[20] Hainsworth (1991: 10).
[21] Rudd (1993: 27).
[22] The comments of Vessey (1973: 6f.) are typical in this regard: 'Statius was an overt and committed supporter of Domitian, of the *divina domus* and of its courtiers. . . . His poetic career ended as it had begun: in fervent loyalty to the Flavian house'.

made the deeper implications of the *Thebaid* so difficult for seventeenth-century and modern readers to detect and appreciate. The poem was intended primarily for the benefit of a small, educated and sophisticated audience who would have appreciated the subtle allusions that have escaped readers far removed from the cultural environment of first century Rome.

Statius creates in the *Thebaid* a mythic cosmos that reflects his contemporary Rome. The *Thebaid* is better described as a *meta-epic* than simply an epic: the palimpsestic world imaged (a Rome in collapse, stripped of its wealth and grandeur but not its violence) is the world of the epic (Thebes and Argos). Apparent in the smaller textual details is the cultural and political substructure of the poet's age without its ideological component. The details of Amphiaraus' haruspicy (3.456ff.) and augury (466ff.) conform to Roman practices.[23] When Bellona hurls a spear from Thebes to Argos to signify the commencement of hostilities between the cities (4.5–8), her action mirrors the fetial procedure of the *indictio belli* that involved the hurling of a spear into the enemy's territory.[24] The *Opfertod* of Menoeceus before the walls of Thebes (10.756ff.) closely resembles the apotropaic *deuotio* of Decius Mus at the battle of Vesuvius in 340 BCE related by Livy (8.9ff.).[25] Even a single word invests the context with a contemporary resonance: the reference to Eteocles as *princeps* ('first citizen', *Theb.* 1.169) has a political significance that transcends the localised context.[26] The poet's manipulation of plot and treatment of theme and character do not merely suggest a contemporary application but invite it. The *Thebaid* has clear political and moral implications and speaks directly to the most important issues of the first century.[27]

The notion that Statius invested the plot and characters in the *Thebaid* with meaning that would be manifest and significant to a refined Roman audience but imperspicuous to subsequent readers is not one likely to find much favour among modern scholars who themselves see interest

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[23] Cf. Legras (1905: 245f.), Vessey (1973: 152f.) and Frings (1992: 50).

[24] On the fetial procedure for declaring war see *inter alia* Samter (1909: 2259–65), Wissowa (1912: 500–04), Latte (1960: 120–24), Ogilvie (1965: 110–112, 127–36), Dahlheim (1968: 171–81) and Rich (1976: *passim*, esp. 57–62, 104–07).

[25] Cf. Appel (1909: 14), Yerkes (1953: 59–61), Schetter (1960: 13), Vessey (1973: 121f.), Versnel (1981: 151) and Dominik (1994: 107–09).

[26] See below, p. 150.

[27] Scholars who argue for an interpretation of the *Thebaid* along contemporary lines include Burck (1953: 701ff.), Burgess (1978: 364ff.), Ahl (1982: 927ff.; 1986: 2812ff.) and McGuire (1990: 21ff., esp. 28ff.).

only in the mythic setting, characters and events of the epic.[28] But it should be remembered that there was a tradition of the use of myth for political purposes in Rome. As Vergil's *Aeneid* (e.g., the parade of Roman heroes: 6.756ff., 855ff.), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (e.g., the parody of an Augustan council: 1.163ff.), Seneca's *Thyestes* (e.g., its condemnation of tyranny: 204ff., 334f.), and the lost tragedies of Aemilius Scaurus (*Atreus*; cf. Dio Cass. 58.24; Tac. *Ann.* 6.29) and the poet Curiatius Maternus (e.g., *Thyestes*; cf. Tac. *Dial.* 3.3; 2.1) attest. Yet many scholars have not only failed generally to recognise the extent to which mythological poetry in Rome operated close to the corridors of power as an instrument of political dialogue, but more specifically they have failed to perceive that Statius was utilising the prototypic myth of internecine war to express the concerns of his age about the contemporary political situation. In doing so, Statius was challenging his audience to become involved personally in unravelling and decoding his text, to go beyond the range of its literal meaning in order to extract its veiled meaning, perhaps thereby even to share in the responsibility for its public and private meanings. It is a challenge worthy of great poetry—as evidenced in the superb craftsmanship of the *Thebaid*'s poet—yet one that has seldom been taken up with sufficient seriousness.

Poet and Emperor: Statius and Domitian

The parallels between the world view suggested in the *Thebaid* and the contemporary situation as revealed in the works of the elder Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, the younger Pliny, Dio Chrysostomus and Dio Cassius would have been fairly obvious to contemporary observers of the political situation. These writers make frequent references to the cynical designs and insatiable quest for absolute power—compare the *nuda potestas* ('raw power') that Eteocles and Polynices covet (*Theb.* 1.150)—of ambitious and vindictive Roman emperors, particularly the Julio-Claudians and Flavians, most of whom are portrayed as inflicting long-standing suffering upon the citizenry during and after the civil wars. The criticism of imperial deeds that suffuses these accounts is

[28] Henderson (1991: 30–80) projects the so-called Harvard school/European school views of Latin poetry (without mentioning these terms, *q.v.* Johnson 1976: 8ff.) upon Statius' epic through alternating voices of critical interpretation.

coloured by the hostile opposition of the senatorial and aristocratic (i.e., privileged and moneyed) classes to autocracy.

Despite the anti-imperial bias of these writers, the portraits drawn by them of an emperor such as Domitian are remarkably similar in their concentration upon the oppressive nature of his rule. The general picture that emerges of Domitian from a reading of Suetonius, although consistent generally with the unfavourable portraits of the emperor offered by writers on the period such as Tacitus and the younger Pliny (who significantly managed successful careers under Domitian), is more balanced than these other accounts because reference is also made to the exemplary qualities of the emperor. While Tacitus, for instance, portrays Domitian as a ruthless, jealous and suspicious tyrant for his entire fifteen-year reign (*Agr.* 3.2; cf. Plin. *Pan.* 52.7), Suetonius tells us that Domitian displayed admirable integrity and mercy in the early part of his reign (cf. Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 11.3; *Epit.* 11.2; Eutrop. 7.23.2f.; Oros. *Hist.* 7.10.1f.) but that later a gradual deterioration in his disposition and conduct took place (*Dom.* 10.1; cf. 3.2; Eutrop. 7.23.2f.).[29] There seems little doubt that he was held in contempt by the Senate since after his assassination it decreed that his statues be demolished, the inscriptions on his monuments be erased, and that all other traces of his memory be destroyed (Suet. *Dom.* 23.1; Plin. *Pan.* 52.4f.).

Although the ancient accounts of his character and actions are extremely unflattering, some modern historians have attempted to show that Domitian was not a tyrant.[30] Johnson's response to the efforts to rehabilitate (reconstruct?) the reputation of the Julian emperors is just as relevant to the attempts to do likewise to the Flavians (especially Domitian):

> Although it is commendable to seek out what was sane in the policies and administrations of those lurid Julian emperors (Nero chief among them) whom the historical novel, Hollywood, and television have fed on with such relish, the historian who attempts to reclaim these rulers

[29] For other passages portraying Domitian as a tyrant, see Tac. *Agr.* 2.1–3; 44.5; 45.2; Suet. *Dom.* 1.3; 10.2–5; 11.1–3; 12.1f.; 14.1; 15.1, 3; Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.3; *Pan.* 2.3; 33.4; 48.3–5; 49.1f.; 52.4f., 7; 76.3; 90.4f.; Dio Cass. 67.1.1, 67.1.3f., 67.2.3–7, 67.3.1–5, 67.4.5, 67.9.6, 67.11.2f., 67.12.1–5; 67.13.2f.; 67.14.1–4; Juv. *Sat.* 4.37f., 72–75, 86–88, 145f., 150–54.

[30] The studies of Dorey (1960: 66–71), Pleket (1961: 296–315), Waters (1964: 49–77; 1969: 385–405), Christ (1962: 187–213) and Jones (1973: 79–91; 1979: *passim*; 1992: *passim*) are the most notable examples of this tendency to argue against Domitian's reputation as a tyrant; cf. Cancik (1965: 14).

> entirely for rational historical purposes, by explaining away what is sinister and grotesque in their reigns and by ascribing lucid purpose to them with lavish hand, pursues an aim that is as sentimental (in its way) as it is futile. Nor, of course, should we succumb here to the temptation of supposing that the *content* of the writers who lived and wrote in these and later reigns can best be understood in terms of literary conventions that excessive rhetorical training (is there such a thing?) and a mysterious passion for being decadent had ripened to rottenness. Pondering their nation's past and present, lacking the precious hindsight and apparent dispassion that help today's historians in their unwritings of Tacitus, the great post-Augustan writers tended to see *their* Rome and its history as terrifying and incomprehensible (though they were valiant in their efforts to comprehend it), and their unforgettable imaginations of the terror of history cannot be charmed away by the historian's or the rhetorician's appeal to decorum and coherence.[31]

Then there is the facile argument that Statius could feel safe in incorporating his criticism of institutional monarchy in the *Thebaid* only if Domitian was not a tyrannical emperor.[32] The dilemma confronting Domitian was similar to the one facing Apollo in the Coroebus episode. In this episode Coroebus is highly critical of the deity for his cruelty directed against an innocent Argive citizenry (1.648–57). If Apollo had taken vengeance against Coroebus he would only have substantiated the charge. Similarly it can be argued that Domitian would have found it difficult to act directly against Statius or to prohibit the circulation of the poem without confirming the validity of the criticism contained in it. However, the force of this reasoning did not prevent Domitian from meting out stern punishment to more direct critics of the Principate such as Arulenus Rusticus and the younger Helvidius Priscus. While Statius realised that the Theban legend was the perfect vehicle for reflecting on the disastrous consequences of the senseless pursuit and abuse of power, the destructiveness and futility of civil war, and the unremitting suffering of mankind in a hostile universe that appears to preclude human well-being, he also knew that the use of the traditional myth sufficiently distanced him from contemporary politics. He could still bring notice to particular issues of the day in the correspondences evoked through the careful manipulation of the legend and textual detail; the key was to evoke sufficient resemblance to the contemporary political situation without being *too* obvious (cf. Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.67ff.). Lewis observes that during the

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[31] Johnson (1987: xi–xii).
[32] Hartman (1916: 359ff.).

despotic reigns of the Flavian emperors 'no honest man's comment on that age could be made in plain terms. . . . The enormities of history and myth provided a medium through which men could still express their horror, amazement and despair'.[33]

Statius made the choice of subject for his epic during the rather peaceful reigns of Vespasian (69–79) and Titus (79–81). He began the *Thebaid* sometime between 78–80 and completed it between 90–92.[34] The epic was well advanced in conception when Domitian ascended to the throne in 81 and in a late stage of composition when his character began to worsen. Therefore Statius' muted criticism of the Principate is not aimed (exclusively) at Domitian. Hardie asserts forcefully that there 'is no obligation to believe that the angry tyrants of Statius . . . are intended as critical of Domitian',[35]but it is not hard to imagine the emperor being somewhat offended by the unfavourable picture of institutional monarchy in the poem that all too easily could be associated with some of the excesses of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors. The *Thebaid*'s meaning transcends a merely literal or linear interpretation (the pure narrative of myth) and is endowed with additional possibilities derived from the broad spectrum of cosmic and human experience that are applicable generally to the position of the Roman people under these emperors. Or as Henderson puts it:

> . . . Statius' readers cannot avoid contemplating up close the collapse of a royal house, the end of such dynasties as the Julio-Claudian and . . . of *whatever* lineage will succeed it, the mass-destruction that absolutist monarchy must eventually spell for its cultural order, according to the age-old mythologic of epic Thebes. This was one 'secret' of power at Rome that could never be concealed. Had some kind of Labdacidal 'Tragedy' *not* befallen *their* Rome?[36]

Indeed the theme of *fraternas acies* ('fraternal strife', *Theb.* 1.1) in the imperial house was a political *locus communis* in the first century. According to Tacitus, Romans condoned Nero's murder of Britannicus because of the ancient examples of fraternal strife and the infeasibility of dividing the throne (*Ann.* 13.17). Domitian may well have been aggrieved at the theme of *fraternas acies*, which—although it could have referred

[33] Lewis (1957: 134).

[34] Legras (1907: 338f.) proposes the dates 79/80–91/2; Kytzler (1960: 340ff.) and Venini (1961: 59f.) suggest 78/9–90/1.

[35] Hardie (1993: 68).

[36] Henderson (1993: 166).

mainly to the civil and political chaos in the year following Nero's death—would have given strength to the rumours of an alleged split between himself and his brother Titus.[37]

But would Domitian have construed Statius' condemnation of tyranny in the *Thebaid* as a *personal* attack upon his rule? Since any contemporary level of interpretation is obscured by both the literalness of the mythic narrative and by the intrinsic universality of the meaning of the text, this may have suggested to Domitian that the criticism was not aimed specifically at him. A poet such as Statius seems to have felt reasonably free to criticise and address the difficulties of his time through the use of figurative language, which enabled him to achieve thematic effects and complexities of association beyond the literal meaning of his writings. Statius survived mainly because his condemnation of imperial rule was implicit and concealed within a mythological superstructure that superficially was flattering to the emperor. He took safe refuge in the narrative of myth and the use of figurative language.

In his *Institutio Oratoria* Quintilian discusses *emphasis*, a special figure that he observes was very popular during his time and that he felt could not let pass without some comment. The device is one whereby the writer raises a suspicion that his meaning is other than what the literal meaning of his words indicates. The meaning that the writer intends the reader to perceive is not the opposite of what is literally stated, as in verbal or rhetorical irony, but rather a concealed meaning that lies beneath his surface statement (*Inst. Or.* 9.2.65). One of the three conditions under which Quintilian mentions that the writer may employ this device of *double entendre* is when it is unsafe to speak openly (9.2.66).

Quintilian mentions specifically how a writer can speak his mind without exposing himself to danger at the hands of a cruel and capricious ruler:

> quamlibet enim apertum, quod modo et aliter intelligi possit, in illos tyrannos bene dixeris, quia periculum tantum, non etiam offensa uitatur. quod si ambiguitate sententiae possit eludi, nemo non illi furto fauet. (*Inst. Or.* 9.2.67)
>
> For one can well speak openly at pleasure against the tyrants under discussion, provided this can be understood in a different way, since

[37] This possibility is mentioned *inter alios* by Heuvel (1932: *ad Theb.* 1.196) and Kytzler (1960: 352).

it is only danger to oneself, not giving offence to them, that is to be avoided. Now if the danger can be evaded by ambiguity of expression, there is no one who will not delight in your cunning.

This ambiguity and obscurity of expression that Quintilian refers to is precisely that which pervades portions of the *Silvae* and *Thebaid.* When a poet uses *emphasis* or irony, he runs the risk that he will be misunderstood, but this misunderstanding can work to the advantage of the poet. Since the less favourable implications of the ambiguous references in the *Thebaid* seem less clear cut than in a few of his occasional poems,[38] the critic must search harder for the truth behind the mask of the literal meaning of the text. This veiled approach of the poet is necessary in a period when any direct expression of dissent could be construed as a personal attack upon the emperor (cf. Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.66). Even with this approach, however, there was a limit from an artistic standpoint as to the number of times that rhetorical artifices such as *emphasis* and irony could be employed without losing their effect and becoming too obvious (cf. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.72).

Statius could safely condemn past emperors such as Nero (*Silv.* 2.7.100, 104, 118f.) and Gaius (3.3.69–75)—the poet describes them as *tyranni* ('tyrants', *Silv.* 2.7.100; 3.3.72)—as long as this direct criticism did not appear to reflect unfavourably upon Domitian. The prologue to the *Thebaid* (1.1–45, esp. 17–33) contrasts vividly with the *Silvae*'s criticism of past emperors and suggests that Statius was an unabashed admirer of Domitian. Numerous other ingratiating allusions and flattering references to Domitian and his rule in the *Silvae* (e.g., 1.1.61f.; 4.3.135; 5.1.261) and *Achilleid* (1.14–19) enhance this impression. Statius also composed a poem (*De Bello Germanico*) on Domitian's German and Dacian campaigns in which he apparently praised the emperor (cf. *Silv.* 4.2.63–67, esp. 66f.). Many critics and historians, among them Ercole, Scott, Cancik, Gossage, Vessey and Williams, have accepted unquestioningly these *laudes Domitiani.*[39] Is it possible Domitian too was convinced that Statius was sincere in his regard for him? For the praise of Domitian by Statius in the prologues to his epics and flattering references to the emperor in his occasional poems would appear on the surface to constitute an unqualified statement of support for the

[38] This is evident, for example, in the comparison of Domitian and Earinus with Jupiter and Ganymede (*Silv.* 3.4); see Garthwaite (1978: 87–129; 1984: 111–24).

[39] Ercole (1931: 43–50), Scott (1933: 247–59), Cancik (1965: 93–100), Gossage (1972: 182, 208–11), Vessey (1973: 6f.) and Williams (1978: 166f.).

emperor. Such blandishment, however, like *any* writing, cannot be attested for related reasons as being representative of the poet's true feelings: in terms of the literary tradition singing the emperors's praises was a standard and even necessary part of writing epic and occasional poetry; on the political level Domitian is said to have been offended at those who failed to eulogise him (Dio Cass. 67.4.2; cf. Plin. *Pan.* 1.6).

Indeed the expressions of admiration and support for Domitian are so adulatory as to suggest their insincerity to a modern observer. They should not of course be automatically rejected on that score alone. But there is no reason to presume a Roman audience to be less sensitive to verbal ambiguity and irony than a modern one. Imperial incidents recounted by Tacitus attest. On one occasion when Augustus complimented Tiberius in a speech to the senate, he let drop certain remarks about Tiberius' deportment, dress and habits that evidently were intended as reproaches under the guise of apologies (Tac. *Ann.* 1.10). On another when Tiberius praised Germanicus rather demonstratively, his audience immediately detected the insincerity of the emperor (1.52). On yet another Burrus, a member of Nero's audience, reputedly grieved as he praised the emperor's artistic ability (14.15).

During the rule of Trajan, the younger Pliny took care to assure the emperor that his *laudes Traiani* should not be construed to mean exactly the opposite of their literal meaning:

> non enim periculum est ne, cum loquar de humanitate exprobrari sibi superbiam credat; cum de frugalitate, luxuriam; cum de clementia, crudelitatem; cum de liberalitate, auaritiam; cum de benignitate, liuorem; cum de continentia, libidinem; cum de labore, inertiam; cum de fortitudine, timorem.
>
> (*Pan.* 3.4f.)
>
> Indeed there is no danger that when I speak of his humanity he considers himself being reproached for arrogance; or that he will think I mean extravagance when I speak of his frugality, cruelty instead of clemency, avarice rather than generosity; or that he will presume spitefulness when I talk of his kindness, wantonness instead of self-control, idleness rather than industry, or fear instead of courage.

Elsewhere Pliny observes that prior to Trajan imperial panegyric was immensely unpopular for its insincerity (*Ep.* 3.18.7). *Praetor* in 93 and *praefectus aerari militaris* from 94–96, Pliny betrays a sense of guilt for the prosperity he enjoyed during the reign of Domitian through his condemnation of the emperor (e.g., *Ep.* 9.13.2–4; *Pan.* 52; esp. *Pan.*

95.3f.), his apparent sympathy with the opposition to that emperor (cf. *Ep.* 3.11; *Pan.* 90.5), and his assertion that he was not brought to trial as he should have been under Domitian (*Pan.* 7.27.14). Tacitus, who became *praetor* and *quindecimuir sacris faciundis* in 88, reveals a similar sense of guilt for his advancement under Domitian through his vigorous denunciations of the emperor's memory (e.g., *Agr.* 2.3; 3.2f.; 39.2f.; 43.4; 44.5; 45.1f.; *Hist.* 4.2; 4.68). While Pliny's and Tacitus' tributes to Trajan (e.g., Plin. *Pan.* 1.1f.; Tac. *Agr.* 3.1; *Hist.* 1.1) are not unlike those composed by poets to Domitian, Pliny urges that his own praises of the emperor are to be interpreted differently from previous imperial panegyric (i.e., literally rather than ironically). Whether or not Pliny himself expects his audience to interpret *this* to mean the opposite of what he says, at the very least he suggests the insincerity of the fulsome flattery directed toward Domitian.

It should be pointed out too that Statius' 'praise' of Domitian in his epics is restricted to the prologues, which are conspicuously detached from the narratives and their mythological contexts—and in the case of the *Thebaid*, the criticism of tyranny that suffuses it. Domitian, however, seems to have been satisfied enough with Statius' *overt* displays of support and admiration for his rule. Even though the poet's specific (e.g., *magne parens mundi*, 'great father of the world', *Silv.* 4.1.17) and general tributes (e.g., *Achil.* 1.14–19) may seem too effusive and therefore no less obviously insincere than, say, either Juno's address of Jupiter in the *Thebaid* as *iustissime diuum* ('most just of the gods', 1.250) or Coroebus' invocation of Apollo as *diuum optime* ('most honourable of the gods', 651), the crucial point is that they were capable on the surface of being interpreted by Domitian as genuine expressions of respect and affection for him. Statius describes how he was *ordered* (cf. *est iussum*, *Silv.* 1 *praef.* 20) to compose posthaste one hundred hexameters (1.1) commemorating the emperor's newly dedicated equestrian statue (1 *praef.* 18–20), but the poet still refers to Domitian in the same sentence as an *indulgentissimus imperator* ('a most indulgent emperor', *Silv.* 1 *praef.* 19). Other prominent writers such as Quintilian and Martial were no less enthusiastic than Statius in their *public* praise of Domitian. If a writer wanted to criticise or poke fun at Domitian, he could do so only *privately* (cf. *secreto*, *Silv.* 4 *praef.* 31) unless he was willing to risk being put to death by an aggrieved emperor (cf. Suet. *Dom.* 10.2, 4; 18.2; Dio Cass. 67.12.5). Despite Tacitus' comments about the limits of artistic expression under Domitian (e.g., *Agr.* 2f.), the emperor provided institutional support to these writers and the

literature of the period generally flourished during his reign. Presumably Domitian would have actively promoted a poet such as Statius only if he felt assured generally of his support for him, at least on an official level.

Judging by his expressions of gratitude to Domitian, Statius appears to have been the object of the emperor's generosity on only a few occasions, namely, when the emperor provided him with a water supply on his Alban estate (3.1.61–64), ensured his victory in the Alban festival (3.5.28–31; 4.2.63–67), and invited him to a banquet at the imperial palace (4.2.5–10; cf. 4 *praef.* 6f.); in fact Statius is at pains to stress that the imperial invitation is his first (*ego cui sacrae Caesar noua gaudia cenae / nunc primum . . . dedit*, 'I, to whom Caesar now has granted for the first time the new joys of a divine banquet', 4.2.5f.) and the favour *longo post tempore* ('a long time after', 4.2.64) his Alban victory.[40] The poet's standard expressions of gratitude for a few imperial favours in his *Silvae* and possibly even the grateful recognition that he owed at least some of his good fortune to his father (cf. *Silv.* 5.3), a poet-teacher who tutored Domitian (cf. 5.3.178–80; 1.1.35f.),[41] does not *per se* signify loyalty to the emperor and support for his policies. Juvenal, a contemporary of Statius, insists that Statius would have starved if he had not sold his *Agave* to the *pantomimus* Paris, despite the immense popularity of the *Thebaid* (*Sat.* 4.82–87). While Statius almost certainly did not lack to the point of penury, it seems clear that the popularity of the *Thebaid* did not result in imperial acceptance or financial independence for its poet.

Despite their fulsomeness, the flattering references to Domitian would have acted as a form of insurance against any charge of impropriety vaguely directed against Statius for those sections of the *Thebaid* that might have offended the emperor (cf. Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.75). As the *direct* references to Domitian are *entirely* laudatory, this would have overridden any criticism of tyranny in the epic that may have reflected adversely upon his rule. In addition, the surface impression of Theseus and various Olympians with whom Domitian might reasonably be identified would appear to be favourable owing to the strong political,

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[40] Statius was victorious at the Alban games in March 90. The imperial banquet for which he gives thanks in *Silv.* 4.2 probably took place early in 95 (Legras [1907: 345], Cancik [1965: 82f.] and Garthwaite [1989: 90]), not 93 or earlier, as Garthwaite (1978: 133–35) suggests by ascribing a date of 93 to the composition of *Silv.* 4.2.

[41] Hardie (1983: 10f.).

cultural and religious associations of these figures. Since they were likely to be identified or compared with members of the imperial family, particularly Domitian, the appearance of these characters in the text *could* be interpreted by an audience as a statement of public support for the Roman imperial cult. At least Domitian appears to have been satisfied enough with the surface references to his divinity—especially his superficially flattering identification with Jupiter and Minerva—to bear the less favourable implications of some of the comparisons. Moreover, Statius scrupulously avoids comparing Domitian directly with morbid deities such as Pluto and the Furies, perhaps because there was no political benefit to be derived by the emperor in tolerating such obviously unflattering comparisons.

Any form of *libertas* was entirely incompatible with the Principate (cf. Tac. *Agr.* 3) and this appears to have been especially the case under Domitian (cf. 43). This realisation escaped some of the poet's contemporaries such as the historian Hermogenes of Tarsus, the philosophers Arulenus Rusticus and the younger Helvidius Priscus, the biographer Herennius Senecio and the sophist Maternus. Domitian acted swiftly against any real, imagined or actual offence against his person or rule. Suetonius says that Hermogenes was executed and his copyists crucified for unflattering innuendoes in his History (*Dom.* 10.1). Arulenus, according to Suetonius, was executed for publishing panegyrics upon the Stoic senators Thrasea Paetus and the elder Helvidius Priscus and describing them as *sanctissimi uiri* ('the most holy men', *Dom.* 10.3; cf. Dio Cass. 67.13.2; Tac. *Agr.* 2.1), while the younger Helvidius was put to death for allegedly rebuking in a comic afterpiece the divorce of Jupiter from his wife under the characters of Paris and Oenone (*Dom.* 10.4). Tacitus tells us that Herennius (and Arulenus) were executed for eulogising Thrasea and the elder Helvidius, respectively (*Agr.* 2.1; cf. Dio Cass. 67.13.2). According to Dio Cassius, Maternus was executed for delivering a practice speech against tyrants (67.12.5).[42]

Domitian quite simply had nothing to gain politically from enduring the sort of criticism invested in the younger Helvidius' unflattering comparison of him with Paris. Nor was there anything to be gained from enduring the more direct criticism levelled against the Principate by Arulenus, since in eulogising staunch supporters of the Senate such as Thrasea and the elder Helvidius, he was in effect declaring his

[42] This figure may be the poet, dramatist and senator Curiatius Maternus, whose political tragedies such as *Domitius* and *Cato* could easily have offended Domitian.

support for the Senate and his opposition to Domitian.[43] In view of the virtual suppression of the Senate by Domitian, it is not difficult to see why Arulenus was executed. That the emperor felt it necessary to take strong action against these figures was due primarily to their senatorial affiliations and political activism rather than their literary pretensions and compositions. Equally there was little point in the emperor tolerating the rhetorical invective of Maternus directed against tyrants. As in the case of the younger Helvidius, there was simply nothing for the emperor to gain from providing an open forum for political dissension.

Statius posed little political threat to the emperor or danger by association to his patrons and friends (a significant number of whom were young men interested in literature) because of his social position: not only was he an aspiring court poet of middle-class professional standing, but he was also a provincial Greek-speaking (and Latin-speaking) one; most importantly, he had no senatorial status. This does not mean, however, that 'Statius as a professional poet with no political axe to grind speaks the official dogma'.[44] Statius was gravely disappointed over his defeat in 94 (or 90)[45] in the quadrennial Capitoline *agon* presided over by Domitian (cf. *Silv.* 3.5.31ff.; 5.3.227ff.); in each of the aforementioned passages Statius explicitly mentions the *Thebaid* (*Silv.* 3.5.36; 5.3.234), which suggests that he recited part of the epic at the festival.[46] If he did, he could have incurred significant imperial displeasure from the *Thebaid*'s implicit condemnation of the Principate through its various references on the human and divine levels to fraternal strife and the abuse of power.

[43] On Thrasea and the elder Helvidius, cf. Wirszubski (1960: 138–43, 147–49) and Brunt (1975: 26–31).

[44] Mendell (1967: 109).

[45] The dating of Statius' defeat in the Capitoline festival is much disputed. Kerckhoff (1884: 30), Härtel (1900: 8), Legras (1907: 343), Frère (1944: xviii, 126 n. 3), Marastoni (1970: 132), Wood (1970: 1011), Vessey (1973: 53 n. 2), Garthwaite (1978: 134, 137–39, 146; 1989: 84–87, 90), Traglia and Aricò (1980: 126 [cf. 1980: 19]), and Benker (1987: 54f.) propose 94; while Garthwaite's argument for 94 is credible, Benker's is tentative and spurious. Legras (1907: 343f.) and Garthwaite (1978: 138f.; 1989: 84–87, 90) consider the poet's defeat at the games to be the reason for his decision to leave Rome. Vollmer (1898: 19 n. 11), Giri (1907: 446ff., esp. 451), Kytzler (1960: 350–53), Traglia and Aricò (1980: 19), Hardie (1983: 62f.), van Dam (1984: 14 n. 16), Cancik (1986: 2685), Coleman (1988: xviiif.) and Dewar (1988: 253) advance 90 as the date of Statius' defeat.

[46] Cf. Kytzler (1960: 348ff.), who thinks that Statius may have recited part of books 11 and 12.

Given the severity and speed of his reprisals against individuals suspected of disparaging him, one would naturally think that Domitian, who composed poetry himself (cf. Quint. *Inst. Or.* 4 *proem.*; 10.1.91f.; Suet. *Dom.* 2.2; Tac. *Hist.* 4.86; Mart. *Epigr.* 5.5.7; Stat. *Achil.* 1.15; Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 1.10–12; Sil. Ital. *Pun.* 3.621; Plin. *Nat. Hist. praef.* 5), was familiar with Homer (*Dom.* 12.3.; 18.2) and Vergil (9.1), gave public readings of his works (2.2), and presided over literary contests (4.4), would be as sensitive to innuendo, ambiguity and allegory as his contemporaries. Yet after his accession Domitian apparently read little and made no effort to become acquainted with history or poetry (Suet. *Dom.* 20; cf. 2.2). Furthermore, up until its publication and even afterward the *Thebaid* was probably not often read in its entirety—and certainly not in one imperial sitting. Despite the popularity of the poetic *recitatio* during the late first century (cf. Juv. *Sat.* 7.36–47; Plin. *Ep.* 1.13; 7.9; Mart. *Epigr.* 3.44.12; Tac. *Dial.* 9), one would have to stretch the imagination some considerable length to contemplate a reading of the *Thebaid* over a period of some days—perhaps we could call it a *Thebaid*athon—and then imagine that its imperial audience would capture the significance of its complicated web of themes, structures, images and symbols.

We cannot know for sure whether Statius intends the *liuor* ('envy') overclouding the *Thebaid* (12.818) and his apprehension about its fate (*Silv.* 1 *praef.* 5–7; *Theb.* 12.810–12; cf. *Silv.* 4.7.25–28) to be applied to Domitian. Although Statius was generally successful in veiling his criticism of the Principate with ambiguous references and frequent surface praise of Domitian (cf. 1.1–45, esp. 17–33, which Kytzler proposes was composed expressly for the Capitoline games held in 90[47]), the emperor's judging of the competition presented him with an ideal opportunity to avenge any possible slight by denying Statius a coveted victory. If anyone was bold enough to suggest that Domitian was guilty of vindictiveness in not awarding the first prize to Statius, this charge could be answered readily enough by pointing out that the passages recited were not worthy of victory. In the *Silvae* the poet

[47] Kytzler (1960: 331–54, esp. 350–53). *Contra* Schetter (1962: 204–17, esp. 214–16); cf. Venini (1962: 55–88, esp. 59f.). Although Kytzler's theory is plausible if Statius competed in the Capitoline games in 90, the entire prologue to the *Thebaid* may not have been composed until after the rest of the epic had been completed. The prologue in its extant form could not have appeared before the latter half of 89, since the central section (1.17–33) refers to the double triumph celebrated by Domitian over the Chatti and Dacians in the summer or autumn of that year (cf. 17–20).

attributes his defeat in the Capitoline festival to Jupiter (3.5.31–33.; 5.3.231–33), referring to him as *saeuum ingratumque Iovem* ('cruel and ungrateful Jove', 3.5.32f.) and *Tarpei* ('the Tarpeian Father', 5.3.233), quite possibly veiled references to Domitian.[48]

Statius decided to retire to Naples sometime toward the end of 94 (cf. *Silv.* 3.5), a period coinciding with Domitian's reign of terror. To the poet his native city represents the ideal community far from the civil and political unrest of Rome:

> Pax secura locis et desidis otia uitae
> Et numquam turbata quies somnique peracti.
> Nulla foro rabies aut strictae in iurgia leges:
> Morum iura uiris solum et sine fascibus aequum.
> (*Silv.* 3.5.85–88)
> An untroubled peace exists in the region and the leisure
> Of an idle life; the quiet and sleep are never disturbed.
> No rage prevails in the forum or laws unsheathed in dispute,
> Just established rights of men and justice without the fasces.

While Statius may have desired to return to his native city because of ill health (cf. *Silv.* 3.5.37ff.),[49] it is conceivable that he felt compelled to return on account of a deteriorating relationship with the emperor.

Although his failure at the Capitoline games and departure from Rome hint at Domitian's annoyance, that Statius appears to have suffered only slightly through his criticism of the Principate demonstrates that a considerable amount of poetic skill combined with no small measure of good judgement could enable the poet to achieve a significant artistic gain at the expense of his emperor.[50] It was perilous work and a poet had to approach his task carefully, as indeed Statius suggests (cf. *Silv.* 3 *praef.* 2–7). There were obvious limits to the emperor's tolerance of artistic indiscretions. Statius knew that if he had written freely on delicate matters of political and social significance he would have risked being expelled from the court, an event that would have spelled professional disaster for him. Alienation he might have been willing to risk, but he also knew if he was careless that he would

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[48] Imhoff (1863: 17) was the first to suggest this for *Silv.* 3.5.32f., but this possibility was dismissed by all subsequent scholars (e.g., Vollmer 1898: 431; Frère 1944: 126 n. 4) until Garthwaite (1978: 140ff.; 1989: 86ff.), Traglia and Aricò (1980: 126), and Benker (1987: 53f.).

[49] Vessey (1973: 44; 1977: 134); *contra* Garthwaite (1978: 136f.; 1989: 83f.).

[50] Rudd's (1993: 27) statement that since 'Statius remained unharmed, one wonders whether the *Thebaid* was so explosive after all' completely misses the point.

have invited a fate similar to other writers under Domitian who were charged with *laesa maiestas* and were condemned. His effusive praise of the emperor *necessarily* contrasts with the hostile presentation of monarchy in the *Thebaid*. We cannot be certain that Statius survived Domitian, and if he did outlive him,[51] whether he had the chance to recant his flattery of the emperor, as Martial did (*Epigr.* 10.72); nor, if he did outlive Domitian, can we be sure that he would have condemned the emperor as a tyrant, as he did Nero (*Silv.* 2.7.100) and Gaius (3.3.72). But there is little reason to believe that Statius' obsequiousness toward Domitian was any more sincere than Martial's hollow flattery of the same emperor (*Epigr.* 7.99) or Lucan's fulsome praise of Nero (*Phars.* 1.33–66).

Myth and Politics: Theban and Imperial Courts

Specific correspondences between the courts at Thebes and Rome emerge. Especially appealing is the easy identification of Oedipus and his sons with Vespasian and his sons, thereby suggesting a direct parallel between Eteocles and Domitian.[52] Attention is directed immediately toward such a comparison in the opening line of the *Thebaid* where reference is made to *fraternas acies* ('fraternal strife'). This analogy is based mainly on the hostile relationship between the sons of Oedipus that recalls the uneasy relationship between Domitian and Titus recounted in Suetonius. According to Suetonius, Domitian plotted against Titus openly and secretly on his brother's accession (*Dom.* 2.3; *Titus* 9.3), declared openly that Titus had altered their father's will to deny him a share in imperial power (*Dom.* 2.3), considered offering a double largesse to win the soldiers to his side after Vespasian's death (*Dom.* 2.3), stirred up the armies almost to the point of revolt (*Titus* 9.3), and bestowed no honour on Titus after his death except deification (*Dom.* 2.3). Titus' alleged intimacy with Domitia Longina, Domitian's wife (*Titus* 10.2; cf. Dio Cass. 66.26.3f.), is also consistent with the popular belief in the brothers' estrangement at the time. Not all modern scholars, however, agree that Domitian was hostile toward Titus.[53]

[51] Vollmer (1898: 18 and n. 10) and van Dam (1984: 2) believe Statius probably died not long after Domitian was assassinated in 96.

[52] Cf. Snijder (1968: 19f.); *contra* Vessey (1973: 63f.).

[53] See especially Hartman (1916: 350), Waters (1964: 55ff.) and Urban (1971: 76ff., 100–02).

Hartman discounts even the possibility that rumours of animosity between Domitian and Titus existed by arguing that Statius would not have written an epic on the theme of fraternal strife unless the relationship between the brothers was cordial. However, fear of imperial reprisal did not prevent Statius from inviting other unflattering associations to be made between the Principate and events and characters in both the *Thebaid* and the *Silvae.* It matters little whether there was actually any animosity between Domitian and his brother. The mere rumour of a rift invites an audience to make an immediate comparison between them and the Theban brothers.

The third century historian Dio Cassius attributes to Domitian a number of unfavourable personal qualities that also inform the character of Eteocles. Domitian was over-bold, prone to anger and secrecy, and inclined to recklessness and treachery (67.1.1). Statius ascribes similar qualities to Eteocles (and Polynices): *furor* ('madness', *Theb.* 1.126), *aegra laetis inuidia* ('envy ill-disposed to the fortunate', 125f.), *parens odii metus* ('fear that generates hatred', 127), *ruptae uices* ('broken covenants', 128), *iuris secundi ambitus impatiens* ('ambition intolerant of second rung', 128f.), and *regendi saeuus amor* ('ruthless love of power', 127f.). Admittedly the pro-senatorial Dio is writing much later than the period he recounts and is simply imputing to Domitian the characteristics of a tyrant; furthermore, the qualities ascribed by Statius to the brothers could readily be attributed to any one of a number of Julio-Claudian emperors. But as Dio's description is consistent with the senatorial perception of Domitian as a cruel and capricious ruler during the time of Statius, the portrayal of Eteocles in a similar vein invites a comparison to be made between the two rulers.

Eteocles is also referred to as *contemptus rex* ('a contemptible monarch', 2.652), *iniquus dux* ('an unjust ruler', 2.656f.), *iniquus rex* ('an unjust monarch', 2.656f.; 3.206), *inuisus* ('hated' and 'malicious', 3.58), *rex ferus* ('a fierce monarch', 3.78), *dux infandus* ('an abominable ruler', 3.96), *sontis tyranni* ('a guilty tyrant', 3.110), *rex impius* ('an impious monarch', 11.499) and *saeuus* ('cruel', 12.57); these epithets characterise unfavourable qualities imputed to Domitian by ancient historians. The term *rex* ('monarch') is clearly uncomplimentary, as it is associated closely with tyranny in the *Thebaid* and other imperial literature (e.g., *libera regum*, 'free from tyrants', Luc. *Phars.* 6.301; *ferus rex*, 'cruel tyrant', Mart. *Spect.* 2.3).

In fact *rex* suggests a more specific connexion between Eteocles and Domitian, as elsewhere Statius (seemingly) uses the term to apostrophise the emperor:

Tunc omnes patuere dei laetoque dederunt
Signa polo, longamque tibi, *rex*[54] *magne*, iuuentam[55]
Annuit atque suos promisit Iuppiter annos.
(*Silv.* 4.1.44–46; my emphasis)
Then all the gods opened their temples and gave signs
In joyous heaven and to you, *great monarch*, Jupiter
Granted a long youth and promised his own years.

Given the fulsome (if superficial) praise of Domitian in *Silvae* 4, a reader could assume that *rex* ('monarch') is in apposition with *Iuppiter* ('Jupiter'); however, the careful placement of *rex* between *tibi* ('to you') and *magne* ('great') suggests that *rex* is to be read as a vocative with *magne* (i.e., Domitian).[56] At the very least, Statius creates an ambiguity in which *rex* could refer either to Domitian or Jupiter; even if *rex* refers only to Jupiter (by punctuating *longam tibi rex, magne, iuuentam*[57]), the title seems hardly favourable to the emperor, given the close official association between Domitian and Jupiter, and *magne*, which alone would then refer to Domitian, is ambiguous.[58]

Less ambiguous is the reference to Eteocles as *princeps* ('first citizen', *Theb.* 1.169)—this term immediately follows the poet's apostrophic denunciation of the monarch (165–68)—which further strengthens the identification of the emperor with the Theban monarch. As Ahl observes, this proleptic reference is one of the most startling in Flavian epic.[59] It was certain to have impinged upon imperial sensibilities since it would have reflected quite adversely upon *any* emperor, Domitian included.

The portrayal by ancient historians and biographers of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors is illuminating. Certainly the problem of the literary sources should not be underestimated, but if the impression that these writers convey of these emperors represents the

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[54] Markland's (1728) emendation of *rex* to *dux* (followed by Håkanson [1969: 112]) is entirely unnecessary. Even if the manuscript reading (codex Matritensis Biblioth. Nation. 3678, fifteenth century) were wrong, the use of *dux* in the Statian corpus is not without its unfavourable implications, as seen in the references to Eteocles (*Theb.* 2.656f.; 3.96).

[55] I have changed Marastoni's (1970: 80) punctuation of this line.

[56] Coleman (1988: *ad Silv.* 4.1.46), although accepting that *rex* and *magne* are in apposition to each other, sees nothing pejorative (or ambiguous) in the phrase; indeed Coleman in her commentary discerns nothing (even potentially) ambiguous in the *Silvae*.

[57] So Leo (1895: 22), Vollmer (1898: 446) and Marastoni (1970: 80).

[58] See below, p. 164f.

[59] Ahl (1986: 2832f.).

general feeling among the upper classes in Rome during the period about which they wrote *(the actual historicity of their accounts is a separate matter altogether)*, then the actions of Theban kings in the *Thebaid* were bound to encourage Romans to think of their own rulers. The picture of Theban monarchs like Eteocles and Creon and a claimant to the throne such as Polynices mirrors the impression conveyed of emperors and numerous pretenders in Tacitus. The *Zeitgeist*—the gloomy and violent atmosphere alleged by these historians to have existed during the reigns of Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors—pervades and infects the *Thebaid*.

This suggestion of a comparison between the Theban and the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties makes even more relevant Statius' apostrophic denunciation of the Theban brothers for their mutual fratricide (11.574f.) and his expression of hope that memory of the crime would fade except in the minds of future *reges* ('monarchs', 578f.). The idea that the crime of the Theban brothers is so monstrous it should fade from the minds of ordinary men and women reminds an audience all the more of its hideousness. As witnessed by the compelling need for the poet to explore the causes of the fratricide by presenting the course of events leading up to its perpetration, the crime is so abhorrent that it cannot be forgotten. Hence one of the important lessons of the *Thebaid* is that the tyrant can control and destroy but he cannot escape the memory or censure of men and women. This idea is reminiscent of the Tacitean notion that the tyrant cannot erase the memories of his people, works of great writers, or the judgement of subsequent generations:

> ... socordiam eorum inridere libet, qui praesenti potentia credunt extingui posse etiam sequentis aeui memoriam. nam contra punitis ingeniis gliscit auctoritas, neque aliud externi reges aut qui eadem saeuitia usi sunt, nisi dedecus sibi atque illis gloriam peperere.
> (*Ann.* 4.35)
>
> ... this makes one inclined to laugh at the folly of those who believe that the political authority of the present can go so far as to extinguish the memories of people in the next generation. On the contrary, the repression of genius increases its reputation; nor will alien tyrants or those who follow their cruel practices accomplish anything except to bring public dishonour to themselves and glory to their victims.

Statius' apostrophe of Domitian as *magnus rex* ('great king) in *Silvae* 4.1.46 and the plausible connexion between the Theban brothers (Eteocles and Polynices) and their Flavian counterparts (Domitian and

Titus) presumes that the fratricide is designed to serve as a warning to Domitian on the consequences of pursuing and abusing imperial power. The fratricide specifically brings to mind Dio Cassius' allegation that Domitian was responsible for the death of Titus (66.26). When Hypsipyle's twin sons compete against each other during the funeral games for Opheltes in *Thebaid* 6, their conduct in the chariot race provides a moral lesson in the type of rivalry and accommodation between brothers that can also be achieved in the political arena. 'They desire to win or to lose only to a brother' (*uincere uel solo cupiunt a fratre relinqui*, 6.345) and their 'ambitious desire for glory never brings the devoted brothers into collision' (*nec umquam / ambitiosa pios conlidit gloria fratres*, 434f.).

Imperial writers had to take extreme care in dispensing any advice that could be construed as a direct criticism of the emperor. In his *Historiae* Tacitus has Galba express the difficulties of advising the emperor while being constrained to flatter him:

> inrumpet adulatio, blanditiae et pessimum ueri adfectus uenenum, sua cuique utilitas, etiam si ego ac tu simplicissime inter nos hodie loquimur, ceteri libentius cum fortuna nostra quam nobiscum; nam suadere principi quod oporteat multi laboris, adsentatio erga quemcumque principem since adfectu peragitur.
>
> (1.15)
>
> Adulation will intrude, and so too flattery and that worst poison of genuine affection, self-aggrandisement. Although today you and I speak candidly with each other, others address themselves more gladly to our good fortune than to us; for it is extremely difficult to exhort an emperor to right action, while to direct flattery toward any manner of emperor is achieved without genuine feeling.

Statius' apostrophe of the brothers and Furies (*Theb.* 11.574–79) mentioned above is only one of a number of passages in the *Thebaid* containing an implicit reference to the responsibilities of a monarch and a subtle warning against failing to heed them. Another is the famous description of the altar of Clementia[60] (12.481–518), which in its presentation of the ideal of humanity and compassion constitutes a solemn entreaty to a ruler to adopt a conciliatory approach to his subjects, namely,

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[60] On the significance of Clementia in Statius, see Verrall (1913: 219ff.), Duff (1927: 382ff.), Mozley (1928a: xviff., xxviff.), Tillyard (1954: 103ff.), Schetter (1960: 77ff.), Ahl (1966: 150ff.), Kabsch (1968: 165ff.), Burgess (1972: 339ff.; 1978: 346ff., 373ff.), Williams (1972: xxi), Vessey (1973: 309ff.), Holland (1976: 238ff.), Rieks (1976: 222ff.), Burck (1979: 340ff.) and Ahl (1982: 934f.; 1986: 2890ff.).

to look after and assist them rather than merely to lord over them.[61] Domitian is portrayed as looking after the interests of the slaves in just such a manner in *Silvae* 3.4, which makes reference to his decree forbidding the castration of slaves (73–77; cf. *Silv.* 4.3.13–15; Mart. *Epigr.* 2.60, 6.2, 9.6; Suet. *Dom.* 7.1; Dio Cass. 67.2.3; Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* 6.42); this poem was probably written in the early nineties along with the final book of the *Thebaid*.[62]

Other links between the Theban and imperial courts are suggested in the speech of the anonymous Theban (*Theb.* 1.173ff.), the exile of Polynices (1.312ff.), and the treacherous ambush of Tydeus and its aftermath (2.59ff.). Numerous scenes of terror and brutality in the *Thebaid* reflect the atmosphere of despair, fear and violence that marked the anarchy of 68 and 69. The sentiments of the anonymous Theban concerning the political uncertainties and vagaries of quickly changing rulers surely would have struck a sympathetic chord with Statius' audience. Many in it would have suffered through the quick succession of five emperors—Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian—during this chaotic period and experienced the reigns of three emperors—Vespasian, Titus and Domitian—from 79–81. Especially compelling to an audience of the late first century would have been the poet's suggestion that the destruction arising from the sowing of the serpent's teeth by Cadmus had destined Thebes to endure civil discord forever (1.180–85; cf. 1.7–9, 227f.; 3.179–83; 8.231f.). In mythological terms the obvious Roman parallel is Romulus and Remus, and the recent civil wars would only have served to confirm the suggestion.[63] The exile of Polynices and instigation of the ambush by Eteocles naturally bring to mind the many cases involving exile or violent elimination of imagined, potential or actual political opposition under the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors. The aforementioned cases of Hermogenes, Arulenus Rusticus, Herennius Senecio, the younger Helvidius Priscus, Carrinas Secundus, Maternus, Thrasea Paetus and the elder Helvidius are only a few of these.[64]

This connexion is strengthened in a subsequent scene when Maeon,

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[61] Burgess (1972: 345f.) sees the ideal of *clementia* ('clemency') presented in *Theb.* 12.481–518 converted into reality in *Silv.* 3.4.73–77.

[62] Most scholars maintain that *Silvae* 1–3 were published in 93 or 94. On this dating see Vollmer (1898: 10ff.), Legras (1907: 340ff.), Newmyer (1979: 47ff.), Bright (1980: 53f.) and Hardie (1983: 64ff.). The *Thebaid* was completed between 90–92.

[63] Cf. Vessey (1971a: 381) and Burgess (1978: 370f.).

[64] On opposition to the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors and punishment meted out by them to their opponents, see MacMullen (1966: 46–94).

an unwilling participant in the ambush of Tydeus (cf. 2.692–95) and the sole Theban survivor of the ensuing clash (2.690–92; 3.59–63), takes his own life in the presence of the Theban monarch (3.81ff.). The muted reaction of the bystanders is indicative of an atmosphere generated by a tyrant on a human (Thebes/Rome) or divine level (Olympus/Hades); furthermore, the reaction can be said reasonably to reflect the type of response one would expect of an imperial audience under similar circumstances: the leading citizens are unnerved (3.92) and the shaken councillors can only raise a murmur (92f.).

This scene contains arguably the most obvious Stoic reference in the entire epic.[65] Like the ideal Stoic, Maeon not only has no fear of impending death, but acclaims it publicly as his destiny (3.65–71, 83–87; cf. Sen *Ep.* 24.11; *Cons. Marc.* 20.1, 3); despite the theatrics of his suicide, Maeon is not (in the words of Martial) 'a man who purchases fame by an easy shedding of his blood' (*uirum facili redemit qui sanguine famam*, *Epigr.* 1.8.5). The heroic suicide is portrayed by the poet as a defiant act against Eteocles and a release from the persecution of a tyrant, an attitude essential to Stoicism (cf. Sen. *Ira* 3.15.3f.; *Ep.* 70.14–16, esp. 15). The Stoics often cited Cato as a model of Stoic virtue (Cic. *Off.* 1.31.112; Sen. *Ep.* 71.8–17) and viewed his suicide as the supreme means of attaining *libertas* (Sen. *Ep.* 13.14; 24.68; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.30.74, 1.49.118f.), a term used by Statius to describe the significance of Maeon's suicide (*Theb.* 3.102).[66] Evoking the memory of a personality such as Thrasea, the incident concerning Maeon reveals him as a hero whose qualities resemble those of this idealised Stoic figure.[67] Thrasea's steadfast dedication to his ideals and principles and willing acceptance of death fascinated and impressed many of his contemporaries. Tacitus describes him as *exemplar uerae gloriae* ('an exemplar of true glory', *Hist.* 2.91).[68] The display of courage by Maeon, who

[65] A similar example is Argia's and Antigone's heroic defiance of Creon and their eagerness to embrace death (*Theb.* 11.456–63, esp. 677–81).

[66] The use of *libertas* here is mainly political; *contra* Vessey (1973: 113–16, esp. 114 n. 3), who contends 'Statius is not thinking primarily of political freedom' and maintains that the sense of *libertas* is moral as well as political. On the meaning of *libertas* in the political sense, see Wirszubski (1960: 146).

[67] Schetter (1960: 42) and Vessey (1973: 114, 116) discern the obvious Stoic qualities of Maeon. *Contra* Ahl (1986: 2831 n. 33): 'Vessey has not established, nor has Statius, that Maeon is a Stoic hero. . . . And even if Maeon were a Stoic hero, self-immolating Stoic heroes, such as Cato, were as political as they were moral'. The latter observation is precisely the point: the political sense of *libertas* and the means of its attainment (even through suicide) are entirely compatible with Stoic tenets.

[68] On Thrasea's view of death as the true expression of individual freedom, see Dio Cass. 62.15.3f., 62.26.4.

is denied his freedom on earth under the tyrant Eteocles and then gains it at the moment of his death, parallels the actions of Thrasea and other figures who preferred to take their own lives rather than submit to the tyranny of their emperors.

The eagerness with which Eteocles' bodyguards prepare to attack the defenceless Maeon further enhances the connexion between the Theban and imperial courts:

> Inde ultro Phlegyas et non cunctator iniqui
> Labdacus (hos regni ferrum penes) ire manuque
> Proturbare parant.
>
> (*Theb.* 3.79–81)[69]
>
> Then Phlegyas and Labdacus, who never shrank from base deeds
> (The sword of the realm was in their keeping) prepare to go
> And assault him by hand.

These lines, which reveal that a tyrant's real power is embodied in his militaristic henchmen rather than in the will of his people, is politically significant: not only is the eagerness of the bodyguards to do physical harm consistent with the treachery of institutional monarchy generally in the *Thebaid*, but their very presence invites an immediate comparison with the notorious *praefecti praetorio* of the emperors.[70] This scene is foreshadowed in another politically charged passage just as the supernatural powers begin to exert their influence upon Eteocles and Polynices:

> Non impacatis regum aduigilantia somnis
> Pila, nec alterna ferri statione gementes
> Excubiae . . .
>
> (*Theb.* 1.147–49)
>
> No spear watched over the monarch's restless sleep;
> Nor did guards groan over their recurring stretches of duty
> With arms . . .

The contrast with life in the imperial house as related by Tacitus and others could not be more apparent.

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[69] Cf. *Theb.* 1.147–49; esp. 11.686f.

[70] Cf. Ahl (1966: 12) for the comparison between *Theb.* 3.79ff. and the imperial court. Two of the more infamous praetorian prefects were Aelius Sejanus and Ofonius Tigellinus, who (judging from the accounts of Tacitus and Dio Cassius) exerted considerable influence over Tiberius and Nero, respectively. On the affection of Tiberius for Sejanus, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.11; on Tigellinus' corruption of Nero, see Tac. *Hist.* 1.72. Sejanus in particular assumed a prominent political rôle during the reign of Tiberius; his political intrigues are recounted by Tacitus (*Ann.* 4–6) and Dio Cassius (68).

But while an act of physical violence could be—and often was—performed against the emperor, as it is against Eteocles (11.542–47), Statius suggests the ineffectuality of an emperor's attempt to harm a courageous subject like Maeon; this idea is reminiscent of the Stoic idea (Sen. *Constant.* 3.4.1f.). For Eteocles proves unable to cause distress to the soul of Maeon by denying his corpse a proper burial (3.108–11). There is of course no evidence to show that the scene involving Eteocles is intended to evoke a specific comparison with Domitian, particularly since the passages may have been conceived or even completed prior to his accession in 81. Many critics of Statius have failed to note the political relevance of these passages to his age.[71] But could the general significance of the foregoing parallels between the Theban court and Principate really have escaped the understanding of an audience with the same culture, traditions and education as its poet?

Monarch and Emperor: Theseus and Domitian

The references to the demeanour of Theseus invite an audience to compare his conduct with the actions of the Flavian emperors following the civil wars of 68 and 69. On the surface such an analogy appears to be favourable to Domitian from an official viewpoint. Theseus' campaign to restore moral sanity to Thebes by ensuring the burial of Argive dead corresponds with the propaganda of the Flavian restoration that stressed the return to peace and order after anarchy in Rome and the provinces during the period.[72] Vessey attempts to link Theseus closely with Vespasian and Domitian.[73] This surface connexion is strengthened through the (ambiguous) use of the epithet *magnanimus* ('high-spirited' or 'great-souled')[74] to describe Theseus (12.795)

[71] For example, Legras (1905: 46) notes that the suicide of Maeon is evidently an invention of Statius but does not comprehend its political significance, while Hutchinson (1993: 303 n. 28) asserts that a political interpretation of the scene along contemporary lines seems most unlikely; more generally, Hutchinson (1993: 256 n. 1) discounts the possibility of political influence upon Statius' individual treatments of death.

[72] Cf. Snijder (1968: 18–21), Williams (1972: xxi), Vessey (1973: 315 n. 1) and Delarue (1974: 439).

[73] Vessey (1973: 314f.). Vessey maintains that Theseus corresponds to Vespasian who restored peace and Domitian who maintained it after the civil wars; he also suggests that Theseus' triumph over the Amazons corresponds to Domitian's victory over the Germans and Dacians; cf. Snijder (1968: 18f.).

[74] *TLL* 8 (1966: 102f.).

and Domitian (814) toward the end of the *Thebaid.*

The superficial association between Theseus and the Principate fully accords with the version dispensed by the imperial propaganda machine. But there lurk beneath the surface some fairly disturbing implications concerning the extremely violent manner in which Theseus restores moral order to Thebes. The comparison therefore reflects adversely upon the Flavian restoration. Associations and comparisons of Theseus with cruel divinities, barbarians, beasts and similarities in mythical circumstances between him and the accursed Oedipus put the Athenian monarch in a bad light. It is no mere coincidence that the menacing countenance of *magnanimus* Theseus evokes wonder (12.709ff.) and fear (730ff.) in Theban warriors, much as the appearance of Domitian was said to inspire these same feelings in his adversaries (Mart. *Epigr.* 7.5.5f.); hence the appropriateness of the meaning 'high-spirited' for *magnanimus*, an epithet used earlier to describe the impulsive Capaneus (*Theb.* 9.547; 11.1f.).[75] As Newman observes, 'It is no ennoblement of Theseus' character that he is compared to Jupiter, and still less if he is compared to Domitian!'[76]

Further undermining the superficially flattering interpretation of the Flavian restoration is the realisation that the violent overthrow of Creon by Theseus symbolises a rejection of the cruel and unjust use of power that defines the rule of a tyrant, whether on a human or divine level. In the *Thebaid* a human tyrant such as Creon possesses many of the same unflattering characteristics that inform the personality of the divine tyrant Jupiter, namely malevolence, rigidity, hypocrisy and lack of concern for natural justice.[77] According to Tacitus (*Agr.* 3.2), Dio Cassius (67.1.1) and other historians of the imperial period, the aforementioned personal qualities were commonly attributed to Domitian during his reign. Judging by the accounts of these historians, a Roman audience of this time may have identified Creon with Domitian just as they may have associated the Theban monarch with Jupiter. If so, the dethronement of Creon by Theseus comes to symbolise not only a rejection of the rule of Jupiter[78] in a universal sense but also that of Domitian on a contemporary level. More particularly, it appears

[75] This adjective appears to refer mainly to the spirited and impetuous qualities of Theseus (and of Domitian by association) rather than any perceived greatness of soul.

[76] Newman (1975: 84).

[77] Cf. Schubert (1984: 297).

[78] Cf. Schubert (1984: 297).

to represent a rejection of the violent methods employed in the Flavian restoration after civil war and a repudiation of the tactics used by emperors to maintain their position.

The Emperor and His Titles: Domitian as Dominus *and* Deus

It was usual for postclassical poets to identify their emperors with various deities.[79] Ovid frequently compares or identifies Augustus with gods and demigods such as Romulus (e.g., *Am.* 2.14.15–18), Hercules, Bacchus (e.g., *Ars Am.* 1.183–204) and especially Jupiter (e.g., *Trist.* 1.1.81, 1.4.26; 4.4.19f.; 5.2.45f.; *Fast.* 1.650; *Met.* 1.200–05; 15.858–60; cf. *Trist.* 3.1.35–38; *Met.* 1.168–76). This practice reached its zenith a half century later under Domitian.[80] According to Suetonius (*Dom.* 13.2; cf. 13.1) and Dio Cassius (67.4.7[=Zonar.11.19]; cf. 67.13.3f.), Domitian assumed the titles *dominus* ('lord') and *deus* ('god')[81] and ordered that they be used by his subjects in writing and in speech (cf. Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 11.2; *Epit.* 11.6; Eutrop. 7.23; Oros. *Hist.* 7.10; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 45.1; Mart. *Epigr.* 5.8.1; 6.3; 7.34.8; 10.72).[82]

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[79] See Riewald (1912) and Ward (1933).

[80] On the identification of Domitian with various deities, see Scott (1933: 247ff.; 1936), Sauter (1934) and Fears (1977: 222ff.; 1981: 74ff.). For the Domitian-Jupiter association see Sauter (1934: 54ff.), Scott (1936: 133ff.), Fears (1977: 222ff.; 1981: 74ff.) and Coleman (1988: *ad Silv.* 4.1.17; 4.2.11, 14, 52; 4.7.49f.).

[81] No date is given by Suetonius (*Dom.* 13.2) for Domitian's assumption of these titles, but Eusebius (*Chron.* [Fotheringham 1923: 272]) gives the sixth year of Domitian's reign (85/86) and Boissevain (1955: 170), Dio Cassius' editor, also assigns it to this period.

[82] On Domitian as *dominus* and *deus*, see Janssen (1919: 62f.), Gephardt (1922: 85), Mooney (1930: 571f.), Sauter (1934: 31–40), Scott (1936: 102–12) and Vessey (1983: 217). The legitimacy of these titles has been disputed *inter alios* by Waters (1964: 67), Thompson (1984: 469–75) and Jones (1992: 108f.). Thompson (1984: 469–75) argues that *Silv.* 1.6.84 reflects accurately Domitian's reticence at being called *dominus* during his reign; cf. Hammond (1959: 210, 235 n. 75), Taeger (1960: 353) and Fears (1977: 191, 223f.). However, I find Thompson's view basically an *argumentum ex silentio.* On the surface *Silv.* 1.6.84 is evidence of Domitian's refusal to be known as *dominus*, but then Statius refers to him precisely by that title in the previous line (1.6.83)! Statius uses the present tense to describe events at a banquet given by Domitian during the Saturnalia—*Tollunt innumeras ad astra voces / Saturnalia principis sonantes / Et dulci dominum fauore clamant* ('Innumerable voices rise to the stars, / Acclaiming their ruler's Saturnalia; / And with delightful good-will they salute their lord', 1.6.81–83)—then shifts dramatically to the perfect tense in mentioning Domitian's refusal to be known as *dominus*: *Hoc solum uetuit licere Caesar* ('This licence alone did Caesar forbid them', 1.6.84). *Deus* is not mentioned in *Silv.* 1.6.81–84, but if *dominus* was forbidden, then *a fortiori* so too (presumably) was *deus.* But Pliny suggests in *Pan.* 2.3 (cf. 52.2) that emperors prior to Trajan were flattered as *dei* ('gods') and *numina*

Was Domitian (in the words of Dio Cassius) so 'puffed up by his extreme folly' (ἐπαρθεὶς ὑπ' ἀνοίας ὕπατος, 67.4.3) or was his 'mind' (to cite Tacitus) 'so blinded and perverted by constant flattery' (*tam caeca et corrupta mens assiduis adultationibus*, *Agr.* 43.4) that he even partly believed in the literality of the numerous references depicting him as a divinity in the Statian corpus, especially the *Silvae*? Juvenal apparently did not consider the idea of Domitian's belief in his own divinity far-fetched when he suggested of the emperor:

> nihil est quod credere de se
> Non possit cum laudatur dis aequa potestas.
> (*Sat.* 4.70f.)
> There is nothing that power cannot
> Believe of itself when it is praised as equal to the gods.

Modern readers may doubt of course whether Domitian was blinded by his own power to the extent that he actually believed himself to be a god, especially since he probably never adopted the path of official apotheosis,[83] but his alleged pretension to godhead (cf. Plin. *Pan.* 2.3; 11.3; 49.1; 52) suggests the possibility.

The expressions *dominus* and *deus*, although complimentary on the surface, are ambiguous, since *dominus* can be associated with both the control of slaves[84] and despotic rule (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 4.11.6; *Pan.* 2.3; 45.3; 52.7; 55.7; 88.1; Mart. *Spect.* 2.11f.), while *deus*, as revealed in the picture that emerges of the gods in Statian epic, particularly of Jupiter, is anything but flattering. Notwithstanding, an obvious benefit of being compelled to acknowledge Domitian's status as a deity is that Statius would be able to satisfy Domitian in regard to his public view of imperial rule without being forced to compromise himself in regard to his real feelings concerning the Principate. Under the apparently harsh and oppressive rule of Domitian (as portrayed in our sources), poets such as Martial and Statius could be expected

('divinities') and were *tyranni* ('tyrants') and *domini* ('lords'); these presumably would include Domitian. Even though Domitian probably did not *officially* assume divine honours, which would have been a radical departure from the tradition of imperial *recusatio*, the historical and literary references to Domitian as a divinity are so numerous as to create the impression of a *de facto* apotheosis. On balance the most likely situation is that Domitian declined early in his reign to use *dominus* and *deus* in reference to himself but eventually expected these titles to be used when being addressed. I thank historian Saul Bastomsky (Monash University) for sharing his views on this matter with me.

[83] Cf. Fears (1977: 222–26).

[84] Sauter (1934: 36ff.).

to conform to his wishes not only in order to continue receiving material aid but also to avoid personal danger. There would have been little point in doing otherwise, especially since compliance did not necessarily imply belief in (such a ridiculous notion as) an emperor's divinity,[85] as is clear in the case of Martial when after the death of Domitian he recants his flattery of his former patron (*Epigr.* 10.72), whom by his own account he had addressed as *dominus deusque* ('lord and god', 10.72.3). Indeed Martial in his epigrammatic poetry makes frequent references to Domitian as a god (e.g., 5.5.1f., 5.8.1; 7.2.5f., 7.5.1–3, 7.8.2, 7.34.8, 7.40.1f., 7.99.8; 8.2.6f., 8.8.6f., 8.82.3f.; 9.28.8, 9.66.3, 9.93.3, 9.102.23f.; 13.74.1f.; 14.1.2), equating him with Jupiter (e.g., 4.8.12; 9.86.7f.).

Domitian is compared to various deities and demigods in the *Silvae* (e.g., 1.1.61., 1.6.34, 46f.; 3.3.64–66; 4.3.128ff.; 5 *praef.* 9–11, 5.1.37f., 5.2.169f.), especially Jupiter (e.g., 1 *praef.* 17–20, 1.6.25–27; 3.4.16–20; 4.1.17; 4.2.10–12, 14–16; 4.4.58; 4.7.49–52). In *Silvae* 4.2 he is likened specifically to Mars (46f.), Pollux (47f.), Bacchus (49), Hercules (50f.), and according to the poet, most appropriately to Jupiter (53–56). The emperor is also associated closely with Minerva, who weaves a robe for him (*Silv.* 1.21f.). While a superficial examination of the *Thebaid*'s text at various points appears to place these divine and semi-divine figures in a favourable light, a closer investigation of the poem often exposes the unfavourable nature of these characters and their actions. The connexion between Domitian as lord of the earth and ruler of mankind (cf. *Theb.* 1.29–31; *Silv.* 4.2.14f., 4.3.128f.) and Jupiter as lord of the sky and king of the gods was no doubt intended to be flattering on the surface and was consistent with the association of the emperor with Jupiter that was made in the Roman imperial cult under the Flavians. Furthermore, this identification of Domitian with Jupiter, his divine *alter ego*, is one that would have been readily made by the average Roman at large.[86] At an initial glance the necessity for Statius to engage in this kind of servile flattery of the emperor would seem to be an immense poetic handicap. However, Statius is able to achieve effects and suggest complexities of association beyond the literal meaning of the language he employs. The numerous divine references to Domitian in the *Thebaid* and *Silvae* are not as flattering as they first seem.

[85] 'Ridiculous' at least to a sophisticated Roman audience and certainly to modern readers.

[86] Cf., e.g., Bös (1958: 29–35) and Coleman (1986: 3099f. n. 79).

Divine and Earthly Emperors: Jupiter and Domitian

The *Götterapparat* of the *Thebaid* serves an important function in revealing the political implications of the cardinal theme of power. Specific correspondences emerge not only between the Theban and imperial courts but also between the divine and imperial families. As the identification of Oedipus and his sons can easily be made with Vespasian and his sons, so there is an obvious connexion between the supernatural rulers and their imperial counterparts. As in the association between the Theban and imperial courts, attention is directed immediately toward such a comparison in the opening line of the *Thebaid*, for the phrase *fraternas acies* ('fraternal strife) brings to mind not only the enmity between Eteocles and Polynices but also the hostility between Jupiter and Pluto. While the relationship between the divine brothers mirrors the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices, it is in fact the Theban brothers who have followed in the footsteps of Jupiter and Pluto, their divine ancestors (cf. 1.224f.), with their longstanding feud (cf. 8.34–79). In turn the animosity between these sets of brothers parallels that which is alleged to have existed between Domitian and Titus (cf. *Dom.* 2.3; *Titus* 9.3). The similarity in circumstances between all three sets of brothers (Theban, supernatural and imperial) serves to identify Domitian all the more closely with his Theban and divine counterparts.

Statius identifies Domitian with Jupiter in the central, prominent position of the *Thebaid*'s prologue (1.22; cf. 29–31). This identification is strengthened in the association between the Principate and Jupiter suggested when the divine autocrat convenes a council of the gods in order to proclaim his policy concerning the fate of Thebes and Argos (1.197ff.). The setting and atmosphere bring to mind an assembly presided over by the emperor[87] in one of the temples such as the *Concordia* (cf. Cic. *Phil.* 2.8.19; Sall. *Cat.* 46.5f.) or *Apollo Palatinus* (cf. Suet. *Aug.* 29.3).[88] Superficially the scene is flattering to the emperor; however, a Roman audience of the late first century could scarcely have failed to note that the portrayal of the supreme deity beneath the surface was most uncomplimentary and almost certainly would have appreciated the relevance of the depiction of an omnipotent and

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[87] Cf. Ribbeck (1913: 232), Mozley (1933: 36), Williams (1978: 251), Wilkinson (1955: 195), Schubert (1984: 76f., 99, 102f., 296f.) and Ahl (1985: 79).

[88] The Senate probably met sometimes in the emperor's own *domus*, thereby contributing even more to the sense of obedience and obligation to the emperor.

dictatorial Jupiter to their own situation. The autocracy of the divine emperor was a fundamental feature of the ruler cult under the Flavian emperors, especially Domitian.

Through a series of intratextual and intertextual references Statius also carefully links the resplendent setting of the Olympian council with monarchy and imperial Rome. Just a little earlier the poet associates excessive luxury with despotism, describing the measures that a future monarch will take to protect himself, his rule and his wealth in his palace (*Theb.* 1.144–51). It is the description of the 'golden house' and the monarch's personal wealth that is of particular significance here:

> Et nondum crasso laquearia fulua metallo,
> Montibus aut alte Grais effulta nitebant
> Atria, congestos satis explicitura clientes.
> (*Theb.* 1.144–46)
> Not yet were the tawny fretted ceilings of thick gold,
> Nor did massive Greek pillars support gleaming halls
> Expansive enough for the throng of clients.
>
> ... nec cura mero committere gemmas
> Atque aurum uiolare cibis.
> (*Theb.* 1.149f.)
> ... nor did they trouble to entrust jewels to the wine-cup
> And to stain gold with food.

Emblematic of acquisitive monarchy, the description of the expansive halls, heavily gilded ceiling and marble columns is repeated just a little later in the *aurea tecta* ('golden halls', 1.208) of the Olympian setting (1.197ff.) and in the *ostro dives et auro* ('rich pomp of purple and gold', 2.406) of the setting that Tydeus imputes to the Theban court. The close textual proximity between these passages serves to enhance the connexion between acquisitive despotism on the human level and splendorous monarchy on the supernatural level.

Internal intertextuality assumes an especially important rôle in unravelling the *Thebaid*'s contemporary meaning. The striking dialectic between the Olympian setting in *Thebaid* 1.197ff. and the elaborate banquet scene at Domitian's palace in *Silvae* 4.2.18ff. urges the auditor or reader to probe the political significance of the interconnexions.[89]

[89] For other political allusions in the *Silvae* (1.1; 3.4; 3.5; 4.2), see Ahl (1974: 142; 1976: 29–31; 1984a: 205f.; 1984b: 91–102) and Garthwaite (1978: 87–146; 1984: 111–24). For political allusions in the *Achilleid*, see Benker (1987).

On the surface *Silvae* 4.2 is a poem of thanksgiving to Domitian for restoring the poet to imperial favour; on another level the poem functions to subvert this superficial expression of gratitude. Just prior to the banquet scene in the *Silvae*, Statius makes reference to the courtesy of rising in the emperor's presence: *non adsurgere fas est?* ('is it lawful not to rise up?', 4.2.17); in the *Thebaid*, the gods do not dare assume their seats until Jupiter gives his permission (1.203–05). Like the banquet scene, the Olympian setting is superficially flattering to the emperor owing to the resplendent physical surroundings (*Theb.* 1.197–201, 208–10; cf. *Silv.* 4.2.18–31), the atmosphere of sublimity and deference (*Theb.* 1.201–08; cf. *Silv.* 4.2.32–37, *Theb.* 3.253–59), and the dignified and majestic manner of Jupiter (*Theb.* 1.208–13; cf. *Silv.* 4.2.38–56). In *Silvae* 4.2 Statius thinks he reclines with Jupiter in heaven (10f.) and remarks that his palace (described as *Tonantis regia*, 'the palace of the Thunderer') views Domitian's with envy (20f.); the references serve not only to make Domitian's pretence to godhead appear ludicrous but also to identify the emperor closely with the *Thebaid*'s cosmocrator.

The analogy therefore between Jupiter and Domitian is hardly complimentary; rather, it seems that the poet's meticulous descriptions of the huge palatial edifices of the gods and of Domitian and his skilful manipulation of the close official identification of the emperor with Jupiter in the *Thebaid* and the *Silvae* are intended to disparage Domitian under the ambiguous guise of deference and appreciation.[90] In both scenes Statius conveys an impression of massive size and weight (*Theb.* 1.197–213; *Silv.* 4.2.18–37). The initial impression of the descriptions is favourable to Jupiter and Domitian, since the size and weight of their edifices merely bear physical testimony to the grandeur and stateliness of their rule. Upon closer reflexion the implications of the enormous size of the structures become apparent. Physical size translates into imperial dominance and oppression. The suggestion conveyed is that the colossal edifices of the gods and Domitian physically dominate their respective environments in the same manner that the oppressive rule of Jupiter and Domitian weighs upon the world and Rome.

The *Thebaid* has to be understood too in terms of its relationship to other (epic) texts. This external intertextuality contributes to the understanding of the *Thebaid*'s contemporary import, as illustrated in

[90] *Contra* Dewar (1988: 253), who asserts that '*Silv.* 4.2 should perhaps be read as an expression of relief and gratitude for an act of grace which signalled [Statius'] return to the all-important imperial favour'.

the aforementioned Olympian council (1.197ff.). The Statian setting recalls the *concilium deorum* in the opening book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.163–252).[91] Despite the dissent of Juno in the Statian council (*Theb.* 1.250–82), the universal pre-eminence of Jupiter is suggested in this scene as it is in the *Metamorphoses.* In his scene Ovid portrays an Olympian council in terms that have an immediate application to contemporary Rome: *atria nobilium* ('palaces of nobly born', *Met.* 1.172), *plebs* ('the lower order', 173), *Penates* ('homes', 174), *Palatia* ('palace', 176), *Auguste* ('Augustus', 198). Since the Ovidian scene is an obvious parody of an imperial council presided over by Augustus, the lines comparing the loyalty of the people to Augustus with that of the gods to Jupiter come to assume a delicious irony: *nec tibi grata minus pietas, Auguste, tuorum est, / quam fuit illa Ioui* ('nor is the devotion of your subjects, Augustus, less pleasing to you than it was to Jove', 204f.).

Unlike Ovid, Statius does not employ contemporary terminology to suggest a close connexion between Olympian and imperial councils. His method of suggestion is less direct but no less effective. In the *Thebaid* the resignation of deities other than Juno to the all-powerful Jupiter on Olympus recalls the pusillanimous submission of the Senators to the autocratic Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors in the Senate house as described in Tacitus and other writers. Juno is the only deity to raise a voice of protest over the destructive plan of Jupiter in the divine council, yet her powerlessness reflects the impotence of the senatorial opposition under the emperors, especially Domitian. Although the divine council could resemble a session of the Senate under any one of a number of emperors, to an audience of the late first century the scene may well have evoked a typical reminiscence of an assembly chaired by Domitian (even if the scene was written just before or after he ascended the throne in 81). This portrayal of Jupiter as an omnipotent autocrat in heaven is in accordance with the belief intrinsic in imperial ideology that the emperor was above criticism because of his status as the supreme ruler on earth.

The surface suggestion of an association between Jupiter and Domitian is strengthened by the references in the Statian corpus to

[91] It seems to me that Statius has Ovid's *concilium deorum* in *Met.* 1.163–252 rather more in mind that he does Vergil's divine council in *Aen.* 10.1–117. However, Mozley (1933: 36) and Moreland (1975: 28 n. 11) assert (only) that the description of Jupiter and the council in *Thebaid* 1 is modelled on that in *Aeneid* 10; Hardie (1993: 79 n. 45) mentions (only) *Aeneid* 1 and 7 as models for Jupiter's speech (*Theb.* 1.214–47).

them as *magnus*, especially Jupiter as *magnus Iouis* ('great Jove', *Theb.* 2.2), *magnus parens* ('a great sire', 2.715) and *magnus Tonans* ('great Thunderer', 6.282; 10.61; 11.496) and Domitian as *magnus Caesar* ('great Caesar', *Silv.* 2.5.27; 5.1.164f.), *magnus dux* ('a great ruler', 3.1.62; 3.4.57f.), *magnus parens* (4.1.17, 4.2.15) and *magnus rex* ('a great king', 4.1.46). Domitian is also referred to as *inuictus* ('invincible', 4.7.49f.; cf. Mart. *Epigr.* 7.6.8), an epithet frequently used in imperial literature to describe Jupiter (e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 3.27.73; Ov. *Fast.* 5.560).

Jupiter's wielding of his thunderbolt against Capaneus in the antepenultimate book of the *Thebaid* (10.913ff.)[92] recalls *inter alia* his hurling of his thunderbolt against the Giants (Apoll. *Bibl.* 1.6.1), Phaethon (Ov. *Met.* 2.311–13), Hannibal (Sil. Ital. *Pun.* 12.622–24), and the scene (in the middle section of the fourth spiral) on Trajan's Column in which he is shown casting his thunderbolt against the Dacians.[93] The thunderbolt is traditionally a symbol of Jupiter's power and sovereignty.[94] Domitian adopted it for his own purposes to stress both his association with the most powerful of gods and his position as ruler of the earth. Accordingly Statius and Martial salute Domitian as *Tonans* ('the Thunderer'; e.g., *Silv.* 4.4.58; *Epigr.* 7.99.1), *Iouis Noster* or *Iuppiter Noster* ('Our Jove'; e.g., *Silv.* 1.6.27; *Epigr.* 14.1.2). In imperial literature and official Roman imperial ideology, the emperor is represented wielding the thunderbolt against foreign powers. For instance, Statius portrays his friend Vibius Maximus as following the swift-flashing brand of invincible Caesar, meaning Domitian, in the emperor's brief campaign against the Sarmatians in 92 and 93 (*Silv.* 4.7.49–52); and on imperial coinage issued between 84–96 to commemorate his victory over the Chatti in 83 Domitian is depicted hurling the thunderbolt in Jovian fashion against the Germanic tribe.[95] The treatment of the Sarmatians by a Roman force under the personal command of Domitian, who, according to Statius, imposed a harsh law upon the fugitive tribe (*Silv.* 4.7.50f.), and the emperor's campaign against the Chatti, which Suetonius says was unnecessary (*Dom.* 6.1), parallel the violent action of the omnipotent Jupiter, who, while laughing, hurls his thunderbolt against Capaneus (*Theb.* 10.907ff.); later

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92 Other references in the *Thebaid* to Jupiter's power of the thunderbolt include 1.92; 3.320f.; 7.582f.; 8.409f.; 11.483.

93 See Rossi (1971: 142f., esp. photographs 20f. [middle section of the fourth spiral]).

94 See Fears (1981: 79 n. 389 and the references therein).

95 Fears (1981: 79 and n. 388), Mattingly (1930: 372, 377, 381, 386, 389, 399, 403, 406).

Evadne, the self-interested widow of Capaneus, describes Jupiter as *ille fulminis iniusti iaculator* ('that thrower of the unjust thunderbolt', 12.562).

Domitian is further associated with Jupiter in this scene through a familiar imperial theme. Imperial poets linked the wars of their emperors with the Gigantomachy, thereby giving greater substantiality to the victories of the emperors over the foes of Rome. Martial does this in comparing the feast held in honour of Domitian's Germanic victories with the epicurean celebration of the Olympians after their triumph over the giants (*Epigr.* 8.50); he also compares the games held in celebration of the emperor's triumph over the Sarmatians with those the gods would have deserved in honour of their victory over the giants (8.78). Jupiter's confrontation with gigantesque Capaneus recalls the popular Greek myth; however, the ease of the cosmocrator's victory over the hero stands in marked contrast to the struggle of the gods for supremacy over the savage race of giants. Tacitus calls Domitian's false triumph over the Chatti a laughing-stock (*Agr.* 39.1; cf. *Germ.* 37.6; Dio Cass. 67.7.2–4); such too is the laughing Jupiter's victory over Capaneus in an absurdly unequal contest, and it is also emblematic of the human condition in a cosmos governed by a malevolent and unjust power.

Statius describes Domitian and Jupiter wielding their thunderbolts against the enemies of Rome in the *Silvae* (e.g., 4.7.50f.) and the *Thebaid* (e.g., 10.907ff.), respectively. In one of his occasional poems Statius portrays Domitian as *ductor placidissimus* ('a most gentle leader') who shows imperial clemency in punishing the elder Tiberius Claudius merely by thundering rather than hurling his thunderbolt against him (*Silv.* 3.3.158ff.); in actual fact Domitian chose to banish the imperial aide rather than condemn him to death. This action of Domitian was inconsistent with his usual behaviour, judging by the comments of an imperial writer such as Pliny, who describes himself as standing amidst the flames of Domitian's thunderbolts falling all around him (*Ep.* 3.11.3; cf. *Pan.* 90.5), but it illustrates that the emperor could and did show clemency to his subjects; in the *Thebaid*, however, Jupiter shows no such arbitrary mercy, and his treatment of Capaneus recalls Domitian's wonted treatment of direct critics of his regime.

In the *Thebaid* the frequent undermining of Jupiter's sentiments by the poetic narrative furnishes sufficient evidence to suggest that the real significance of his speeches is concealed and must be unearthed. When this is done, Jupiter is revealed as a malevolent deity who despite

his claims is totally unconcerned with justice of any kind. Nevertheless (as pointed out in chapter one), some contemporary critics continue to take at face value the claims of Jupiter that man must be punished for his crimes, and have thus shaped their views of the poem according to the Judaeo-Christian concept of retribution and guilt. Just as Domitian may have contented himself with the superficial flattery of being compared to Jupiter and looked no further than necessary to have his political ends served (something that emperors from Augustus onward often did), these critics appear to do much the same when they probe into the text no further than is necessary to confirm the orthodox view of the *Thebaid*. A politically aware audience during the reign of Domitian could not possibly have overlooked the contemporary implications of Jupiter's plan of fraternal strife based on maximum death and suffering of human subjects who are largely innocent of any wrong-doing. The malicious and unwarranted acts of cruelty instigated by Jupiter correspond to the wanton acts of violence and bloodshed perpetrated by the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties that feature so prominently among the pages of the ancient historians and biographers. The resultant scenes of human violence featuring dismemberment and the rending of human flesh in the *Thebaid* (e.g., 7.760ff.; 9.259ff.; 10.515ff.) reflect the cult of physical terror under the emperors, a consequence of the desire to maintain absolute power at any cost. Thus in the hands of Statius the image of a divine tyrant to represent Jupiter and his actions becomes a mechanism for weakening the official image of the emperor.

Figural Pillars of the Thebaid*: Domitian and Statius*

Domitian and Statius frame the narrative of the *Thebaid* and are the figural pillars of the entire work. Surface praise of Domitian forms the centrepiece (1.17–31) of the prologue (1–45), while the fame of the *Thebaid* is the focus of the epilogue (12.810–19). There is a link between the two sections in the figures of Domitian and Statius. Statius praises Domitian fulsomely if superficially in the prologue (1.17–31); in the epilogue the situation is reversed in the sense that it is Domitian who apparently deigns to know the masterpiece of Statius (12.814). In the prologue Rome longs for Domitian, her *dominus* ('lord'), to be hers forever (1.22–24): the reality is that Rome will outlive its emperor. In the epilogue Statius, the poet, *dominus* of his own work (12.810),

is fated to pass away (819), but the *Thebaid*, his 'godhead', will endure (812–16): it is the *Thebaid* that appears destined to remain in the minds of future ages. Just as Rome will survive Domitian, the *Thebaid* will outlive its master.

Restraint and ambiguity are also the trademarks of the politically astute poet under Domitian. Statius frames the section comprising fulsome praise of the emperor (1.17–31) with comments suggesting the danger of telling the truth (16–24, esp. 16–18, 32f.). The story of *fraternas acies* ('fraternal strife', 1.1, 184) extends back to the origins of the Theban race (3f.), as Thebes was founded as the result of an internecine struggle between armed men (1.7–9; cf. 1.180–85, 227f.; 3.179–83; 8.231f.). This legacy of *fraternas acies* also looks forward to Rome (cf. 1.17–24), as the founding of Rome upon Romulus' slaying of Remus seemed to later Romans to foredoom her to eternal civil strife (cf. Hor. *Epod.* 7.17ff.).

The *recusatio*, Statius' justification for restricting himself to Greek myth and for not writing about the emperor's deeds (*Theb.* 1.16–33; cf. *Achil.* 1.14–19, esp. 18f.), is significant. The poet addresses Domitian:

limes mihi carminis esto
Oedipodae confusa domus, quando Itala nondum
Signa nec Arctoos ausim spirare triumphos
Bisque iugo Rhenum, bis adactum legibus Histrum
Et coniurato deiectos uertice Dacos
Aut defensa prius uix pubescentibus annis
Bella Iouis.

(*Theb.* 1.16–22)

Let the turbulent house of Oedipus be the
Limit of my poem, since not yet may I dare to
Sing of Italian standards or Northern triumphs,
Rhine twice subject, Ister twice brought under our laws,
Dacians cast down from their conspiratorial summit,
Or Jove saved from war only just before you
Reached manhood.

Statius will 'limit' (cf. *limes*, 16) himself to relating the tale of the turbulent house of Oedipus, since not yet 'may he dare' (cf. *ausim*, 18) to channel his poetic inspiration into revealing the details of Domitian's triumphs and *of him*. By declaring pointedly that his theme is intended to apply only to Thebes (16f.) and then juxtaposing this statement with a brief mention of Domitian's deeds (17–22), the poet provocatively suggests the contemporary relevance of his poem.

Statius is not yet ready to talk about Domitian and his exploits (cf. *Achil.* 1.14–19, esp. 18f.; *Silv.* 4.4.93–100, esp. 96–100). Nevertheless

Statius will become sufficiently bold in due course to tell what happened:

Tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro
Facta canam.

(*Theb.* 1.32f.)

A time will come when emboldened by the Pierian gadfly
I shall sing of your deeds.

Here the poet suggests that one has to become poetically mad (cf. 3; *Silv.* 2.7.3; Juv. *Sat.* 4.123) to sing about the emperor and his *facta* ('deeds', *Theb.* 1.33). *Canam* ('I shall sing', 33), reminds us of Vergil's *cano* ('I sing', *Aen.* 1.1). But Statius does not emulate Vergil, who, *audaxque iuuenta* ('emboldened by youth', *Georg.* 4.565), sings ambivalently in the *Georgics* about the politico-social reality of contemporary life.

Nor does Statius follow the poet-conspirator Lucan, for whom he professes great admiration in a commemorative ode:

Nocturnas alii Phrygum ruinas
Et tardi reducis uias Vlixis
Et puppem temerariam Mineruae,
Trita uatibus orbita, sequantur:
Tu carus Latio memorque gentis
Carmen fortior exeris togatum.

(*Silv.* 2.7.48–53; cf. 2 *praef.* 26–28)

Let others follow the tracks worn by poets,
The ruins of Phrygia destroyed at night,
The return paths of lingering Ulysses,
And the intrepid vessel of Minerva:
You, dear to Latium and mindful of your race,
More boldly do you unveil a togaed song.

Statius praises Lucan, not Vergil, for having composed the quintessential Roman epic. For it is the *Pharsalia*, a historical poem with the theme of civil war, not the *Aeneid*, modelled on the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Argonautica*, that defines the national consciousness. Ennius' *Annales*, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, Varro's *Argonautica*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, even Vergil's epic, all benchmarks of Roman epic accomplishment, are destined to pay homage to Lucan's originality (*Silv.* 2.7.75–80). The achievement is political as well as poetic. References elsewhere in *Silvae* 2.7 to *ingratus Nero* ('an ungrateful Nero', 58), *nocens dominus* ('a guilty monarch', 61), *rabidus tyrannus* ('a savage tyrant', 100), *libertate grauis pia Cato*, 'Cato, grave champion of hallowed freedom', 68) and *gratus popularitate Magnus* ('Pompey the Great, favourite of the people', 69) are politically revealing. They suggest that Statius' admiration of Lucan is based not merely

on his predecessor's preservation of the memory of republican resistance to Caesarism in the *Pharsalia* but on his courage in writing an epic that more boldly (cf. *fortior*, 53) establishes a connexion between tyranny and the Caesars than mythological epic.

It is almost as if Statius, who did not lack boldness himself (cf. *Silv.* 3 *praef.* 2–7), yearns for the same courage as his predecessor. Lucan sings of *bella plus quam ciuilia* ('wars worse than civil', *Phars.* 1.1) and *cognatas acies* ('familial strife', 4), as Pompey and Caesar were related by marriage; Statius is inspired to relate *fraternas acies* ('fraternal strife', *Theb.* 1.1), in which the main antagonists are related by birth. The picture of fratricide is more horrifying than the power struggle between in-laws, but Statius does not risk using events and personalities from recent history as epic material. His self-constraint in writing mythological epic functions in effect as a censoring mechanism.

For now Statius will content himself with singing of *arma* ('arms', 1.33) and the *sceptrum* ('sceptre', 34), image-symbols in the *Thebaid* of internecine war and manic, irreverent power, respectively (1.33–37; cf. 11.654). The sceptre links cruel Theban monarchs and aspirants such as Eteocles, Polynices (1.33–37) and Creon (11.654) with Jupiter, who was often portrayed in official imperial ideology as wielding the sceptre.[96] This connexion between Jupiter and his human counterparts is strengthened through the use in the Statian corpus of the epithet *saeuus* ('cruel') to describe them and their attributes (e.g., *Theb.* 3.537 [Jupiter]; 12.57 [Eteocles]; 12.218 [Creon]; *Silv.* 3.5.32 [Jupiter]).

The 'double voice' of Statius emerges elsewhere in the *Thebaid*'s prologue.[97] Ahl poses some intriguing possibilities concerning its underlying meanings.[98] Domitian is described as needing *twice* to subdue the Germanic and Dacian tribes along the Rhine and Danube (*Theb.* 1.19; cf. *Silv.* 1.1.79–81). According to Suetonius, Domitian was intent upon leading a successful military campaign and of equalling the military exploits of his brother Titus (*Dom.* 2.1f.). Tacitus (*Agr.* 39.1), Pliny (*Pan.* 16.3f.) and Dio Cass. (67.3.5, 67.4.1f., 67.7.2f.) describe Domitian's triumphs over the Germans and Dacians as counterfeit.

[96] Cf. Mattingly (1930: 366, 375, 378, 384 [sceptre/thunderbolt], 360 [spear?]).

[97] The ambiguity of the prologue programmes the reader to approach the narrative of the *Thebaid* with an eye toward its underlying meaning; however, the prologue is considered by Moreland (1975: 20) to be a 'protracted, rhetorically padded invocation' that 'detracts from the impact which might have been established at the beginning' of the epic.

[98] Ahl (1982: 923; 1986: 2817ff.).

According to Dio Cassius, Domitian returned from the campaign against the Chatti in 83 without having seen action (67.4.1), while his false triumph over the Dacians in 89 followed his defeat by and truce with the enemy (67.7.2–9; cf. 67.6.3f.; cf. Plin. *Pan.* 11.4; 12.2; 14.5; 82.4f.). To Suetonius, not only was the campaign of Domitian against the Chatti unwarranted, but his double triumph over the Chatti and Dacians was celebrated after battles of varying success (*Dom.* 6.1). Both Dio (67.9.6) and Orosius (*Hist.* 7.10.4) scathingly describe Domitian's celebration of victory in the Dacian war as a triumph not over the enemy but over the troops whose deaths he had caused. Pliny demeans Domitian's martial exploits by saying the day will come when Rome will see an emperor returning home in genuine triumph, bringing peace and the end of conflict, and the *final* submission of his enemies (*Pan.* 16.3f.; cf. 17.1). Although Statius flatteringly urges Domitian to celebrate his triumphs (*Silv.* 4.1.39–43), he also praises him for refusing them (4.3.158f.), perhaps an indication of the public disaffection toward Domitian for his erection of numerous triumphal arches (cf. Suet. *Dom.* 13.2).

Suetonius insists that Domitian was incapable of physical exertion, rarely rode on horseback during his campaigns (instead preferring to be carried in a litter), and took no interest in arms (*Dom.* 19); these characteristics seem scarcely to constitute the deportment of a military leader (cf. Plin. *Pan.* 82.1–9). Is Statius suggesting the same when he describes Domitian's gentleness in arms in relation to Caesar?

> Discit et e uultu, quantum tu mitior armis,
> Qui nec in externos facilis saeuire furores
> Das Cattis Dacisque fidem.
> (*Silv.* 1.1.25–27)
>
> And he learns from your face how much gentler you are in arms,
> Who do not rage easily against the foreigner's wrath,
> But make a compact with the Chatti and Dacians.

Martial inefficacy and tenuous compacts with the enemy seem to mark the military campaigns of this emperor who, we are told, sought fame in spurious triumphs. The martial exploits of Domitian may not be all they appear to be on the surface, since his unmilitary demeanour and the need for a second campaign against the Germans and Dacians suggest the first was not entirely successful.[99] Elsewhere Statius asserts

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[99] Cf. Ahl (1982: 928; 1984b: 93; 1986: 2819).

that the twin laurels of *uates* ('poet') and *dux* ('ruler', 'commander') vie for supremacy in Domitian (*Achil.* 1.15f.) and that 'one grieves to be surpassed' (*dolet altera uinci*, 16). The question is, 'Which one?' Although a single *alter* usually refers to the first-named of two substantives (in this case, *uates*), sometimes it refers to the second. Given the disparaging comments of the imperial writers about his leadership and military capabilities, the question of whether Domitian would be better flattered by being considered a more capable ruler/general than poet or vice-versa hardly says much for his capacity either as a ruler/general or a poet!

In the prologue of the *Thebaid* Statius declares that Rome longs for Domitian to be a part of her memory:

> tuque, o Latiae decus addite famae
> Quem noua mature subeuntem exorsa parentis
> Aeternum sibi Roma cupit.
> (1.22–24)
> You, o glory added to Latian fame,
> Whom following soon upon your father's recent beginnings,
> Rome desires for herself forever.

The practice of Flavian poets such as Statius (*Silv.* 1.1.105–07; 4.1.17–22, 34–39; 4.2.57–62; 4.3.159–64; cf. 4.8.61f.), Martial (*Epigr.* 4.1; 13.4) and Silius Italicus (3.609–11, 625–29) was to express the wish that the emperor inhabit the earth for a long period before ascending late to heaven as *deus*. On the surface Statius expresses a sentiment in accordance with official imperial ideology of the emperor as *aeternus* ('immortal'; cf. *Theb.* 1.24). But could these lines be construed as expressing the hope that Domitian would soon pass away into the memory of his subjects? Ahl thinks so.[100] Such an early death (by one means or another) is all too possible, Statius observes in *Silvae* 2.7, since the highest in rank among men seem destined to live the shortest lives:

> O numquam data longa fata summis!
> Cur plus, ardua, casibus patetis?
> Cur saeua uice magna non senescunt?
> Sic natum Nasamonii Tonantis
> Post ortus obitusque fulminatos
> Angusto Babylon premit sepulcro.
> (2.7.90–95)

[100] Ahl (1982: 928; 1986: 2820).

Ah, the highest are never given long fates!
Why are lofty things more exposed to mischance?
Why by cruel lot does greatness never grow old?
Witness the Nasamonian Thunderer's son,
Who after his lightning-like ascent and death,
Was immured in a narrow tomb at Babylon.

Judging by this passage, Domitian can no more be assured of a long life than was Alexander, his Greek counterpart (or Lucan, the subject of the poem).

Statius does pose the question in the epilogue of the *Thebaid* whether his poem will endure after his own death and immediately answers his question in the affirmative:

Durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes,
O mihi bissenos multum uigilata per annos
Thebai? iam certe praesens tibi Fama benignum
Strauit iter coepitque nouam monstrare futuris.
Iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar,
Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuuentus.
Viue, precor; nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta,
Sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora.
Mox, tibi si quis adhuc praetendit nubila liuor,
Occidet, et meriti post me referentur honores.
(*Theb.* 12.810–19)

Will you long endure and survive your master to be read,
O my *Thebaid*, product of my vigilance for twelve years?
Indeed already present Fame has laid a kindly path for you
And begun to parade you in your youth before the future.
Already great-hearted Caesar deigns to know you
And Italian youth avidly learn and recite your measures.
Live, I pray; nor challenge the divine *Aeneid*,
But follow from afar and always venerate its tracks.
Soon, if any envy still overclouds you, it shall fade,
And after my death due honours shall be paid.

As the reference to an emperor in a *sphragis*, a poet's statement of his literary achievement and immortality (cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.30; Prop. 1.22), is unprecedented,[101] the mention of Domitian at the mid-point of this epilogue (814) arrests.[102] Already Domitian thinks the *Thebaid* worthy enough to know and the Italian youth study and recite it (*Theb.* 12.814f.).

[101] On the *sphragis* in classical literature through Ovid, see Kranz (1967: 27–78).
[102] *Caesar* (referring to Domitian) lies at the end of the fifth line in the ten-line epilogue.

The sentiments in the epilogue bring to mind the bold prediction of Ovid in the epilogue of his epic (*Met.* 15.871–79, esp. 875–79) and in *Amores* 1.15 (41f.; cf. 7–9) that his name would be immortalised in the memory of future generations. The thematic connexion between the Statian and Ovidian *sphragides* is strengthened in the use by Statius of *uiue* ('live') and *livor* ('envy'): *uiue* (*Theb.* 12.816) recalls *uiuam* ('I shall live'), the last word in Ovid's epic (*Met.* 15.879) and the first word in the last line of *Amores* 1.15 (42); *liuor* (*Theb.* 12.818) brings to mind Ovid's use of (the same form of) the word in *Amores* 1.15 (1, 39). Like the epic of Ovid (*Met.* 15.874ff.), the already well-known work of Statius will continue to grow in fame (*Theb.* 12.812ff.); like the envy that afflicts Ovid and his poetry (*Am.* 1.15.39ff.; *Pont.* 4.16.1ff.), that obscuring the *Thebaid* will pass away and the poem will receive its due honours (818f.). In this way its poet will receive no small measure of immortality. The prologue merely expresses the hope that Rome may hold Domitian in her memory forever, but in the epilogue it is Statius rather than Domitian who appears destined to be *honoured* in the memories of future ages, a suggestion afforded great import through the poet's careful placement of *honores* ('honours', 819) as the ultimate word in the epic.

Statius mentions the *Aeneid* in his epilogue and declares that his *Thebaid* is not to rival it but to follow its path reverently (12.815f.). To interpret these lines as a self-conscious acknowledgement of poetic inferiority to Vergil is to misinterpret the significance of the reference.[103] Given the self-confidence and pride exuded by Statius in this epilogue, in the prologue to his other epic (*Achil.* 1.8–13), and in his occasional poems (*Silv.* 2.3.62f.; 5.3.213–19), the reference to the *Aeneid* seems designed to clarify the rôle of the *Thebaid.* Statius' epic does indeed follow the lead of Vergil's, as many scenes from the *Aeneid* are rewritten into the *Thebaid.* Resemblances between the epics abound. Statius' narration of the origins of the war (*Theb.* 1.390ff.) is reminiscent of Vergil's account of the cause of the war in Latium (*Aen.* 7.45ff.); Adrastus' banquet (*Theb.* 1.515ff.) and telling of the tale of Coroebus (557ff.) resemble Dido's banquet (*Aen.* 1.695ff.) and Evander's account of the Cacus myth (8.185ff.), respectively; the appearance of the shade of Laius (*Theb.* 2.1ff.) recalls the appearances of the ghosts of Hector (*Aen.* 2.268ff.) and Anchises (5.719ff.); the funeral games for Opheltes

[103] So, e.g., Mozley (1928a: xxiiif.; 1963: 17), Williams (1978: 150), Hainsworth (1991: 135) and Quint (1993: 132f.).

(*Theb.* 6.296ff.) evoke the memory of those held in honour of Anchises (*Aen.* 5.104ff.); the incident featuring Bacchus' tigers (*Theb.* 7.564ff.) imitates the episode of Iulus' hounds (*Aen.* 7.475ff.); and the mission of Hopleus and Dymas (*Theb.* 10.347ff.) emulates the Nisus and Euryalus episode (*Aen.* 9.176ff.). Through this re-writing of scenes from the *Aeneid*, Statius suggests that the histories of Thebes and Argos have important parallels in the history of the Roman nation. Indeed, as this chapter has attempted to show, each city in some respects *is* another Rome.

That Apollo might set his diadem upon the locks of Domitian is mentioned in the prologue (*Theb.* 1.28f.). Even toward the end of his reign, when he was reputed to have suffered from alopecia, Domitian is portrayed on imperial coinage with a full head of sinuous locks.[104] Statius could hardly portray him otherwise. According to Suetonius, Domitian was extremely sensitive about his baldness and considered any jest or earnest comment made concerning his disfiguring condition to be a personal insult (*Dom.* 18.2; cf. Juv. *Sat.* 4.38; Mart. *Epigr.* 5.49; 6.57; 10.83; 12.45). The reference seems ironic and the awareness of Domitian's unsightly baldness tends to undercut the official portrayal of the emperor as a youthful, pilose *dominus* and *deus*.[105]

The prospect that Jupiter might share willingly his cosmic realm with Domitian suggests dire consequences tantamount to those created by the power-sharing arrangement between Eteocles and Polynices in the main narrative (*Theb.* 1.29f.).[106] Statius' advice to Domitian that he should remain *contentus* ('content', 30) with the ruling of men and women (cf. *Silv.* 1.1.99–107, esp. 105–07; 4.3.128f.; 5.1.37–39) is fraught with ambiguity; the play on the word *contentus*, from either *continere*, 'to hold in check, to restrain', or *contendere*, 'to contend against, vie with', suggests the ideality and reality of power as illustrated in the *Thebaid.* Restraint is the hallmark of a beneficent (but ineffectual) ruler (such as Adrastus); the struggle to acquire and maintain absolute power as shown by various human and supernatural figures (for instance, Jupiter, Pluto, Eteocles, Polynices) indexes the reality of power. Statius further suggests that the emperor should *limit* the boundaries of his rule to the earthly domain by giving out constellations (i.e., by deifying members of the imperial family) rather than becoming one (*sidera dones*,

104 See Toynbee (1947: 126ff.).
105 Cf. Ahl (1982: 928; 1986: 2820).
106 Cf. Ahl (1982: 928; 1986: 2820) and Schubert (1984: 129–31).

'give stars', 1.31; cf. *Silv.* 1.1.94–98, esp. 98; 4.2.59).[107] This delicate admonition not to seek power beyond one's allotted portion accords with the implicit references to the responsibilities of a ruler and subtle warnings against failing to heed them elsewhere in the *Thebaid* (e.g., 11.574–79; 12.481–518).

Olympus and Rome: Divine and Imperial Families

The close identification or association of Domitian with Olympian deities such as Jupiter, Mars, Pollux, Hercules, Bacchus and Minerva in the *Silvae* and the identification of the empress Domitia with Concordia ('Concord'), Fortuna ('Fortune'), Demeter (Ceres), Venus and Juno in official imperial ideology is a reflexion of the Roman ruler cult in which the emperor's family is often compared or associated with various divine and semi-divine figures.[108] These deities frequently appear on imperial coins in association with the various official functions of the emperor. The connexion between Jupiter and Domitian has already been considered. Although Pluto is not mentioned in association with the emperor, the hostile relationship between the divine brothers in the *Thebaid* (cf. 8.34–79) mirrors that which is alleged to have existed between Domitian and his brother (cf. *Dom.* 2.3; *Titus* 9.3). Mars, the father of Romulus, Rome's founder, is depicted on coins in connexion with the success of Domitian in his wars against the enemies of Rome. Significantly the war-god, who is also the father of Harmonia, wife of Cadmus, Thebes' founder (2.269ff.; 3.269ff.; 4.553ff.; 9.821ff.), assumes a prominent rôle in the *Thebaid* and on numerous occasions he is depicted most unfavourably as the *agent provocateur* of Jupiter, the destroyer of cities and the instigator of human violence (e.g., 3.407–31, 575–97; 7.703f.; 8.383–87; 9.566f., 841–76; cf. 3.220f.; 7.22–25, 40–62, 81–84, 108–44, 172–74, 695–98). Pollux (cf. 6.741) and Concordia do not assume a rôle in the *Thebaid* but Hercules, Bacchus, Fortuna, Ceres, Minerva, Venus and Juno make some notable appearances. While the depiction of Hercules is rather neutral, the appearances of these other figures are consistent with the unfavourable impression of the gods that emerges from a close reading of the poem. The most

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[107] Domitian did give divine honours to Titus in 81 and his niece Julia ten years later.

[108] On the association of Domitia with Juno and other deities, see Scott (1936: 84ff.). See Scott (1930: 57, 64ff.) on the identification of members of the Augustan family with various gods.

significant instance of Bacchus' cruelty is the drought that he effects, which causes the Argives much hardship (4.671ff.). Fortuna is portrayed as a capricious and harmful goddess (6.691ff., 936f.; 8.456ff.; 11.648ff.; 12.35, 505; cf. 3.60ff.; 12.420ff.). Ceres appears along with Enyo (Bellona) and the Furies just prior to the sacrifice of Charops' son (5.155ff.).

Minerva, represented in the *Thebaid* as a terrifying battle goddess (e.g., 2.704f., 710–13, 715; cf. 2.718f.; 7.33; 9.87f.), reputedly was entrusted with Jupiter's horrible aegis that (in *Theb.* 12.606–10) so terrifies the Thebans. Judging from the comments of Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* 10.1.91f.), Suetonius (*Dom.* 15.2f.), Martial (*Epigr.* 6.10.9–12; 8.1.3f.; 9.3.10) and Dio Cassius (67.1.2), Minerva was the favourite goddess of Domitian,[109] who, according to Philostratus (*Vit. Apoll.* 7.24), even claimed descent from her. Various literary references (e.g., Mart. *Epigr.* 7.1.1–4; cf. Stat. *Silv.* 4.21f.) and numerous Roman and Greek coins depict Minerva as the divine patroness of Domitian through his wearing of her aegis.[110] Since the first coins representing Domitian wearing the aegis appeared in 84 just a year after his triumph over the Chatti, the emperor possibly wore the aegis during that expedition, just as he did apparently in the campaign against the Sarmatians in 92 and 93 (cf. Mart. *Epigr.* 7.1.1–4). The close connexion between the aegis-wearing emperor, who is said to have superintended the hollow victory over the Chatti and the harsh treatment of the Sarmatians, and the aegis-bearing goddess, who sanctions the spurious triumph of Theseus and his unnecessarily violent treatment of the abjectly helpless Thebans in the *Thebaid*, was bound to reflect unfavourably upon the Principate. The popular perception of Domitian as a cruel and capricious *deus* was entirely consistent with the wanton destructiveness of Minerva in the epic.

Venus and Juno are culpable for two of the most sanguinary episodes in the *Thebaid*. In the Hypsipyle episode Venus destroys sexual love (5.64ff.), foments martial violence (73ff.; cf. 53f., 170ff.), instigates human sacrifice (157ff.) and familial slaughter along with the Furies (190ff.; cf. 85ff.), and forces conjugality upon women with the assistance of Amor ('Love') and Juno (445ff.). Juno's senselessly destructive act in instigating the Argive massacre of the dormant Thebans (*Theb.* 10.126ff.,

[109] On Domitian's veneration (and cult) of Minerva, see Sauter (1934: 90ff.), Scott (1936: 167ff.), Fears (1981: 77f., esp. 78), Girard (1981a: 227; 1981b: 233ff.) and Coleman (1986: 3096 and n. 49).

[110] For the coins see Mattingly (1930: 308ff.).

271–75, 282–84) is occasioned by her petty jealousy against Alcmene and Jupiter for their amorous relationship (75–78). In the *Silvae* Statius associates Domitia with Juno, calling her *Romana Iuno* ('Roman Juno', 3.4.18); this is natural enough, given the official identification of the emperor with Jupiter, and is in accordance with the Roman imperial tradition of associating the empress with Juno and other goddesses. The populace also called Domitia *domina* ('mistress'), just as the emperor was known as *dominus* ('lord', Suet. *Dom.* 13.1). Given the Roman audience's awareness of the close association of Domitia with Juno, would Statius' portrayal of Juno have served to impugn the character of the empress? To an audience *after* the murder of Domitian in 96, could the unfavourable association have suggested in mythical terms the plausibility of Domitia's alleged participation in the conspiracy (cf. Dio Cass. 67.15; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 11; *Epit.* 11)? Whatever the historical circumstances, her rumoured involvement in the murder was in keeping with the actions of her divine counterpart in the *Thebaid.*

The Thebaid *and* Zeitgeist

The despairing portrait of the divine powers, institutional monarchy, the great war and the human condition evidenced in the *Thebaid* necessarily invites a comparison with events and personalities in Rome during the turbulent reigns of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors. The *Thebaid* reflects not only the heart of the poet's pessimistic cosmic vision but also his concern and that of his contemporaries about the harsh and oppressive atmosphere and terrible political uncertainties of his age. Since the *Thebaid* was not composed with the intention of its being interpreted as pure allegory, exact correspondences between contemporary personalities and events in Rome and the characters and incidents in the *Thebaid* are impossible to establish. In his composition Statius set about expressing the concerns of his age through general rather than specific reminiscences of events and characters.

The obscurity of references in the *Thebaid* to specific historical figures under the Principate is well illustrated in the suggested identification of the sons of Oedipus with those of Vespasian. There is no concrete evidence for associating Eteocles and Polynices *directly* with Domitian and Titus, despite the obvious attraction of such an identification. But the point lies in the implicit suggestion of such a relationship, since Statius would have been fully aware that the antipathy between

Eteocles and Polynices and their mutual fratricide would bring to the minds of a contemporary audience the rumoured hostility between the sons of Vespasian and the alleged poisoning of Titus by Domitian (cf. Suet. *Dom.* 2.3). Although represented as flesh and blood characters in the *Thebaid*, Eteocles and Polynices exemplify the type of leaders who have driven Rome to political ruin and intellectual despair. Much of what Johnson says about the figures of Lucan applies to the characters of Statius:

> [N]ot allegories, but symbols, the chief characters of the poem suggest in their different ways—by the various angles of vision they provide and by the refractions of sentiment they incarnate—the vast confusion and ineffable terror of the poem's *materia*: the effects of a civil war fought in the not so distant past on Roman intellectuals who lived in a city where terror had once been, and was again becoming, a way of life; the resentment and anger of freedom frustrated, a love of freedom[111] that can define itself only as hatred of tyranny. . . .[112]

Statius was safe in the knowledge that bloodshed and violence among imperial families so marked the reigns of the other Julio-Claudians that it would have been difficult for Domitian to take direct personal offence over the references. The enmity and fratricide of the brothers could easily invite a comparison with any number of other examples of familial discord and bloodshed among the Julio-Claudians. The murders of Tiberius Gemellus, Britannicus and the younger Agrippina are but a few instances.

In the *Thebaid* the abuse of power on the supernatural and human levels and the condemnation of the violation of justice are applicable to the contemporary political situation under the Julio-Claudians and Flavians. Given the political climate of his age, there was little that an epic poet could do except to express his thoughts through the ambiguity and obscurity afforded by myth and remote history (or quasi-myth). Rudd argues that it was an emperor such as 'Domitian himself who decided what was, and was not, offensive'[113]; in the end, however, the critical censoring agent was not the emperor but the poet himself. The position of Statius was epitomised in the predicaments of Capaneus, the anonymous shade and Amphiaraus in the *Thebaid*. While Capaneus

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[111] *Libertas* as a political concept during the Empire was familiar almost exclusively to the upper classes; for the average person in the street it had very little meaning. On *libertas* under the post-Augustan Principate, see Wirszubski (1960: 124ff.).

[112] Johnson (1987: x).

[113] Rudd (1993: 27).

challenges the authority of Jupiter and suffers a violent death (10.897ff.), the outspoken contempt of the anonymous shade for the gods in his former life leads to a similar tragic fate (2.16–18). Amphiaraus realises that attempts to forestall the supernaturally engineered war are futile, that it is useless to protest against the cruelty and injustice of the gods (cf. 3.620–47, esp. 643–47). Statius was no Capaneus or even anonymous shade; rather, he was an Amphiaraus, who perceives the obvious futility of opposing oppression and injustice. Yet for those Romans who were willing to listen to and read the *Thebaid* carefully, there was both a message and a lesson to be gleaned from its preoccupation with the pursuit and abuse of power.

APPENDIX

LITERARY AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

All dates are CE.[1]

25	**Statius' father born at Velia.**
31	Sejanus executed.
34	Persius born.
35	Quintilian born (?).
37	Tiberius dies; reign of Caligula.
39	Lucan born. Carrinas Secundus banished.
40	Martial born.
41	Caligula murdered; reign of Claudius.
42	**Statius' father gives first public performance (?).**
43	Conquest of Britain.
44	Claudius celebrates triumph for conquest of Britain.
45	**Statius born at Naples (?).**
47	Claudius censor.
48	Messalina executed; Claudius marries Agrippina.
49	Claudius marries Agrippina. Seneca recalled to Rome from exile; becomes *praetor*, tutor to Nero.
50	Plutarch born. Claudius adopts Nero.
51	Domitian born. Vespasian consul. Burrus praetorian prefect.
53	Nero marries Octavia.
53	Trajan born (?).
54	Claudius dies; reign of Nero. War with Parthia.
55	Juvenal born (?). Nero consul. Death of Britannicus. Agrippina loses power.
56	Tacitus born (?). Seneca *consul suffectus*.
58	Poppaea becomes mistress of Nero.
59	Murder of Agrippina. Nero institutes *Ludi Iuvenalia*. Decline of Seneca's influence at court.
60	Nero institutes *Ludi Neronia*. Lucan begins *Pharsalia*. The younger Pliny is born.
61	Rebellion of Iceni under Boudicca.
62	Petronius *consul suffectus*; *arbiter elegantiae* at Nero's court. Tigellinus and Faenius Rufus *praefecti praetorio*. Burrus and Persius die; posthumous publication of Persius' satires. Seneca retires from court. Nero divorces, banishes and murders Octavia; marries Poppaea.
63	Rebellion in Britain and war with Parthia end.
64	Lucan barred from publishing poetry. Great fire in Rome; persecution of Christians.
65	**Statius' father moves to Rome; opens a school; becomes tutor of Domitian (?)**
65	Martial moves to Rome. Failure of Pisonian conspiracy against Nero; co-conspirators (e.g., Piso, Seneca, Lucan, and Faenius Rufus) commit

[1] Question marks indicate uncertainty about dates provided. Events for any particular year are not necessarily given in chronological order.

suicide, are executed (e.g., Plautius Lateranus, Subrius Flavus, Sulpicius Asper); umimplicated figures (e.g., Musonius Rufus and Novius Priscus) banished. Poppaea dies.

66 Curiatius begins publishing political tragedies. Nero begins tour of Greece. Petronius, Thrasea Paetus, Barea Soranus, Scribonius Rufus condemned; the elder Helvidius Priscus banished. Plot of Vinicianus. Nero at Rome crowns Tiridates as king of Armenia. Rebellion in Palestine.

67 Nero completes tour of Greece. Vespasian appointed to suppress Jewish revolt. Corbulo compelled to commit suicide.

68 Silius Italicus consul. Insurrection and defeat of Vindex. Galba becomes emperor; enters Rome.

69 Suetonius born (?). Galba slain; brief reigns of Otho and Vitellius. Tigellinus compelled to commit suicide. Antonius Primus captures Rome; Vespasian declared emperor. Dacians invade Moesia.

70 **Statius' father composes poem on *Bellum Vitellianum*.** Vespasian enters Rome. Rebellion in Gaul suppressed. Titus captures Jerusalem.

71 Philosophers and astrologers banished. Vespasian and Nerva made consuls. Titus returns in triumph from the East. Temple of Capitoline Jupiter restored.

73 Vespasian and Titus censors.

75 The elder Helvidius Priscus executed (?).

76 Hadrian born.

78 **Statius awarded first major literary prize in *Ludi Augustalia* (?).**

79 **Statius begins *Thebaid* (?).** The elder Pliny dies at Stabiae. Vespasian dies; reign of Titus. Eruption of Vesuvius destroys Pompeii and Herculaneum.

80 Fire in Rome; Temple of Capitoline Jupiter destroyed.

81 Titus dies; reign of Domitian.

82 Restored Temple of Capitoline Jupiter dedicated. Domitia made Augusta.

83 **Statius well established in Roman literary society; publishes *De Bello Germanico* (?); *pantomimus* Paris performs *Agave* with libretto composed by Statius; subsequent gap in Statius' career (–89).** Murder of Paris; Domitian bans public performances of pantomimes. Three Vestal Virgins executed for immorality. Domitian celebrates triumph over Chatti.

85 Philosophers expelled from Rome. Domitian *censor perpetuus*. Dacian king Decebalus defeats and kills Oppius Sabinus, legate of Moesia.

86 Domitian institutes *Ludi Capitolini*. Martial begins to publish *Epigrams*. Decebalus defeats Roman general Fuscus.

87 Plot against Domitian.

88 *Ludi Saeculares* held. Silius begins *Punica*. Tacitus *praetor* and *quindecimuir sacris faciundis*. Defeat of Dacians at Tapae.

89 Domitian banishes philosophers and astrologers from Rome (?). Hermogenes of Tarsus executed (?). Rebellion of Saturninus. Domitian arranges peace with Decebalus; celebrates triumph over Chatti and Dacians.

90 **Statius' father dies (?); Statius wins prize at *Quinquatrua Mineruae* (Alban Games); Domitian provides Statius' Alban estate with a regular water supply; Statius fails to win prize at *Ludi Capitolini*.** Domitian enforces laws against adultery and castration; condemns Cornelia, Chief Vestal, to be buried alive.

91 **Statius publishes *Thebaid* (?).** Equestrian statue of Domitian dedicated. (Curiatius?) Maternus executed.

92 Domitian's campaign against Sarmatians.

93 **Statius publishes *Silvae* 1–3 (?).** The younger Pliny *praetor*, successfully prosecutes Baebius Massa. Valerius Flaccus dies. Execution of Arulenus Rusticus and the younger Helvidius Priscus (?).

94 **Statius fails to win prize at *Ludi Capitolini*; Statius decides to retire to Naples.** The younger Pliny *praefectus aerari militaris* (–96). Silius Decianus consul.

95 **Statius publishes *Silvae* 4; attends imperial banquet in Rome.** Domitian expels philosophers from Italy. Quintilian dies. Plot against Domitian; Flavia Domitilla exiled; Flavius Clemens, Acilius Glabrio and Herennius Senecio (?) executed; persecution of Christians.

96 **Statius dies; his *Achilleid* published posthumously.** Domitian murdered in conspiracy of Domitia, *praefecti praetorio* and court officials; reign of Nerva.

97 **Statius' *Silvae* 5 published.**

WORKS CITED AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

Reference is made to the works of ancient Latin and Greek writers, *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 7.1 (Leipzig 1964) and 8 (Leipzig 1966), and *Transactions of the American Philological Association* by the standard abbreviations. The text used of the *Thebaid* is edited by D. E. Hill (Leiden 1983). References to the *Achilleid* and *Silvae* are from the editions by A. Marastoni (Leipzig 1974 and 1970, respectively). All other references to classical writers mentioned are from the editions in the Oxford Classical Series, unless otherwise indicated in the notes. The spelling and punctuation of the texts have been retained generally for citatory purposes, except that I have capitalised the first letter in each line of verse and changed the lower-case consonants *v* and *j* where necessary to the consonantal *u* and *i*, respectively.

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